

ABSTRACT

Jamie Tyler, CONNECTING DURING COVID: MEETING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF VULNERABLE ELEMENTARY STUDENTS DURING A PANDEMIC (Under the direction of Dr. Travis Lewis). Department of Educational Leadership, May 2022.

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated school buildings to close in March of 2020 across the United States. From that time forward, many students remained in virtual learning environments, unable to step onto campus. The remote environments were isolating and struggled to support the academic or social and emotional needs of many students. The inability to access the supports from the physical school environment caused additional challenges for certain student populations, especially those who are considered at-risk academically or described as *vulnerable* due to conditions within the home environment. This mixed methods action research study, framed around the theoretical foundations of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the Science of Learning and Development model, measured the impact of a social and emotional learning, online mentoring framework on levels of student engagement and connectedness. Teachers met virtually with small groups of students for six weeks, implementing lessons that focused on CASEL's social and emotional learning competencies. Both qualitative and quantitative data from surveys and focus groups measured the impact of these lessons. While the implementation of the framework did not significantly impact levels of engagement, it did yield a substantial impact on connectedness within the elementary environment. The study also explored how professional development can support staff in meeting specific needs of vulnerable students. The findings indicated that comprehensive professional development was needed to meet the needs of this population of students. Such professional development should focus on student need and support fostering relationships within the school environment in order to mitigate the educational inequities that result from isolated, remote learning environments.

CONNECTING DURING COVID: MEETING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS
OF VULNERABLE ELEMENTARY STUDENTS DURING A PANDEMIC

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by

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OF VULNERABLE ELEMENTARY STUDENTS DURING A PANDEMIC

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DEDICATION

I give all the glory to God for being able to cross the finish line amongst some of the greatest personal, professional, and spiritual challenges I have ever faced.

To Jackson and Holland -Every success that I have is because of your endless support and love. Thank you. You both are my greatest accomplishment. I set out to prove to you both that *Well done is better than well said*. But I also learned how important the journey is. Enjoy each moment and be present. Even when the journey is difficult. Never give up.

But the Lord stood with me and gave me strength. (2Timothy 4:17) Love fiercely. Love God, Love yourself, and show love to others with kindness and support. Success is about helping others. We rise by helping others.

Psalms 20:4 May He give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed.

Love,

Mom

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To my parents- Thank you for teaching me that it is okay to make your own path in life.

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My cohort- God places people in your life at the right time for a reason. Love you all!
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Bennett Jones- Thank you for always telling me what I need to hear. I know I can count on you when the chips fall.

East- I'm so glad you are at the finish line to cheer me on. On to our next adventure!

The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him and helps me. Psalm 28:7

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Protect me. Guide me. Invest in me. This is what the vulnerable youth in our school systems might say but so often this voice is silent. Vulnerable youth is a term that describes a population of students that are exposed to an increased number of internal and external risk factors. Vulnerable youth are characterized by demographic and environmental factors and are susceptible for poorer outcomes in life when compared to peers (Shah et al., 2015). For the purpose of this study, the term vulnerable as described by Skinner et al. (2006), are youth that lack any of the traits as outlined in Table 1.

With such a wide and encompassing definition, the number of youths who could be described as vulnerable could be expansive, and many could be impacted by more than one deficit. Vulnerable youth is a term that is synonymous with at-risk youth and these terms will be used interchangeably throughout the study when referring to students that must overcome adversity and that have material, social, or emotional deficits.

The term at-risk surfaced as an educational concern in 1983 with the release of the landmark report, *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Social Reform* (United States, 1983). This report captured an unsettled picture of public education in the United States that highlighted illiteracy and achievement levels compared to other countries. This report demands for schools to have high standards instead of mediocre ones and calls for excellence in education for all, regardless of socioeconomic status. Presidential administrations that followed attempted to mitigate the issue of inequity in education and wrote legislation to impose educational reform to address the deficits in public education.

Research links at-risk youth with academic, social, emotional, and physical struggles as well as the potential for negative life impacts, including increased dropout rates, an increased

Table 1

Characteristics of Vulnerable Youth

Deficiency	Element
Material	money, food, clothing, shelter, health care or education
Emotional	care, love, support, space to contain emotions
Social	supportive peer group, role models to follow, or guidance in difficult situations

likelihood of living in poverty or incarceration, and mental health difficulties lasting into adulthood (McDaniel & Yarbrough, 2016; Oldenfield et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2015). There are several contributing factors that can impact the level of needs an at-risk student may present as a result of deficiencies. These risk factors can include socioeconomic status, minority status, and sense of belonging (Ma, 2003; McDaniel & Yarbrough, 2016; Noltemeyer et al., 2012).

Students from lower income households can struggle more academically than middle-class peers for several reasons. These include poor health and nutrition, smaller vocabulary, or a lack of hope and optimism (Basch, 2011; Hart & Risley, 1995). Children living in poverty live in unstable situations that increase the likelihood of academic failure including increased exposure to stressful events and lack of protective adults and family support (Golden, 2016; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; McDaniel & Yarbrough, 2016).

In 2019, 17% of all children in the United States were living in poverty and while poverty affects all races, poverty levels for minorities when compared to those of Caucasian students is much higher. There are 31% of Black or African American students living in poverty, 23% of Hispanic and Latino students living in poverty, and 23.7% of Native American youth living in poverty, as compared to 8% for Caucasian students (Kids Count, 2020). This data is represented in Figure 1.

This figure indicates that there are far more minority children living in poverty than Caucasian. This is an important factor to consider when identifying at-risk and vulnerable youth for intervention. While healthy attachment to family can promote increased self-esteem levels, increased positive feelings about school, and can result in higher levels of school performance (Cowan et al., 2009; Marcus & Sanders-Reio, 2001), vulnerable youth often struggle to make and sustain healthy connections. The lack of connectedness can impact educational success

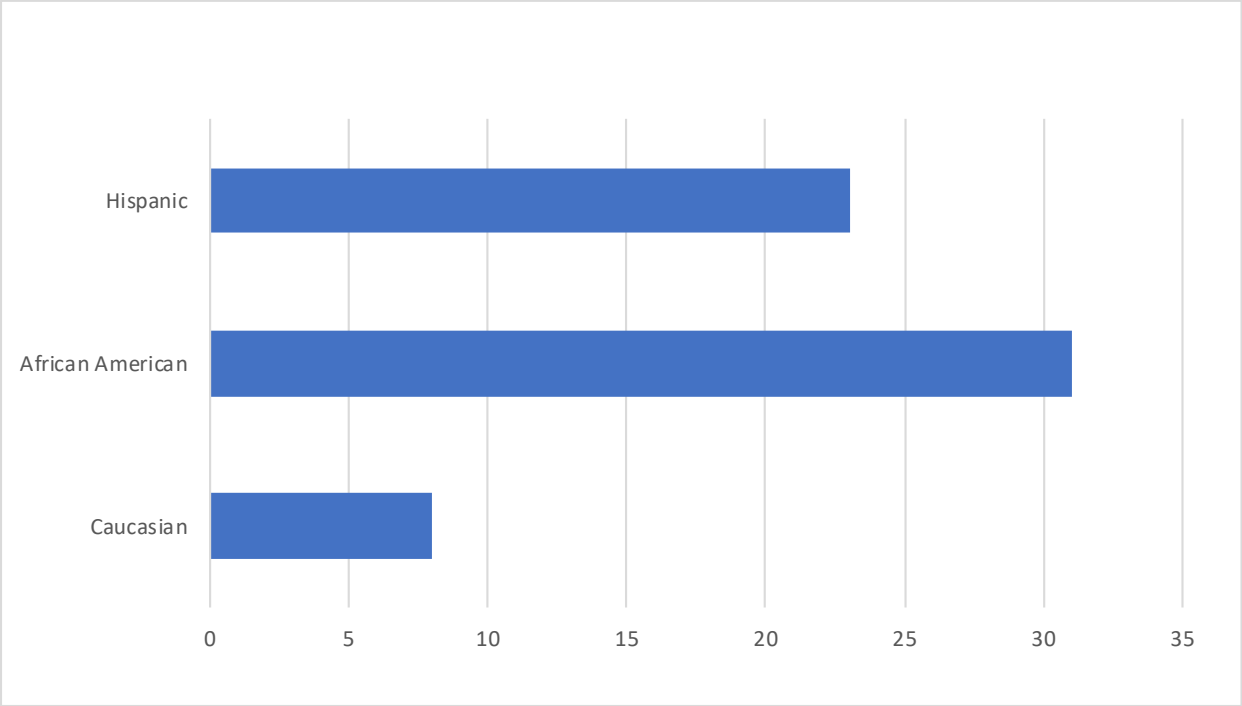


Figure 1. Percentage of children living in poverty in the US disaggregated by race.

trajectories, social acceptance, and health levels (Lacy et al., 2014). When a child feels isolated from family and peers, the body can perceive social isolation as a threat and releases a hormone to protect the body from danger. Prolonged release of the stress hormone can negatively impact growth and development as the brain will focus on survival and the development of other skills and strategies can be altered or stunted (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015). Lack of connection and isolation are also factors associated with the profiles of youth that commit acts of violence (Smith & Sandhu, 2004). The focus on attachment and building connections will be an important factor to consider when creating intervention programs that target at-risk and vulnerable youth.

There are many factors that can create social isolation and decrease levels of student connectedness. This study will specifically focus on one type of isolating event, a pandemic, and the way in which such an event necessitates life changing actions related to health, finances, social situations, and political decisions (Jamison, 2018). This study intended to measure the effects of a social and emotional learning framework on vulnerable elementary youth in response to the isolation of virtual learning as a result of the coronavirus or COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic began in Wuhan, China in early January of 2020 which resulted in quarantine throughout the globe and restrictions on international travel. COVID-19, a type of respiratory infection related to the coronavirus, can be severe for individuals with pre-existing conditions, including heart and lung disease, diabetes, or weakened immune systems (North Carolina Recommends New Steps to Protect Against COVID-19, 2020). By March of 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) had declared the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic, U.S. President Donald Trump had declared a National Emergency, and statewide “stay-at-home” orders began surfacing. The \$2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security

(CARES) Act was signed before the end of March 2020, the largest economic recovery bill in history. The CARES Act provided economic aid to Americans that were affected by the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. By the end of May 2020, the death toll in the United States passed 100,000 and by the beginning of June 2020 there were over 2 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 (*A Timeline of COVID-19 Developments in 2020*, 2020).

In North Carolina, a rapid timeline of events unfolded. On March 10th Executive Order 116 was signed declaring a state of emergency in North Carolina, and on March 14th, Executive Order 117 closed K-12 public school buildings statewide. Schools immediately began instructing virtually, unsure of a date to return to campus. On March 27th, the Stay at Home Order was issued which required all people to stay at home unless visiting essential businesses, to exercise, or to help a family member. In addition, gatherings of 10 or more people were prohibited, and people were required to remain socially distant. Executive Order 122 was signed on March 30th to provide economic support to school systems and local governments. On May 20th the Stay at Home Order was lifted, and the Safer At Home Order went into effect. Safer at Home allowed childcare facilities to open and retail to operate at limited capacity, but school buildings remained closed with virtual teaching continuing. On June 26th, 2020, face coverings moved from a recommendation to a statewide requirement (Goodloe-Murphy, 2020; U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Western County, North Carolina, 2018). Figure 2 outlines the events surrounding the coronavirus in the United States and in North Carolina.

The recognition of the COVID-19 pandemic as a childhood traumatic event allows educators to prepare to help children cope with the intense outcomes that may result from the physical and emotional stress of living during such unprecedented times in society. Childhood

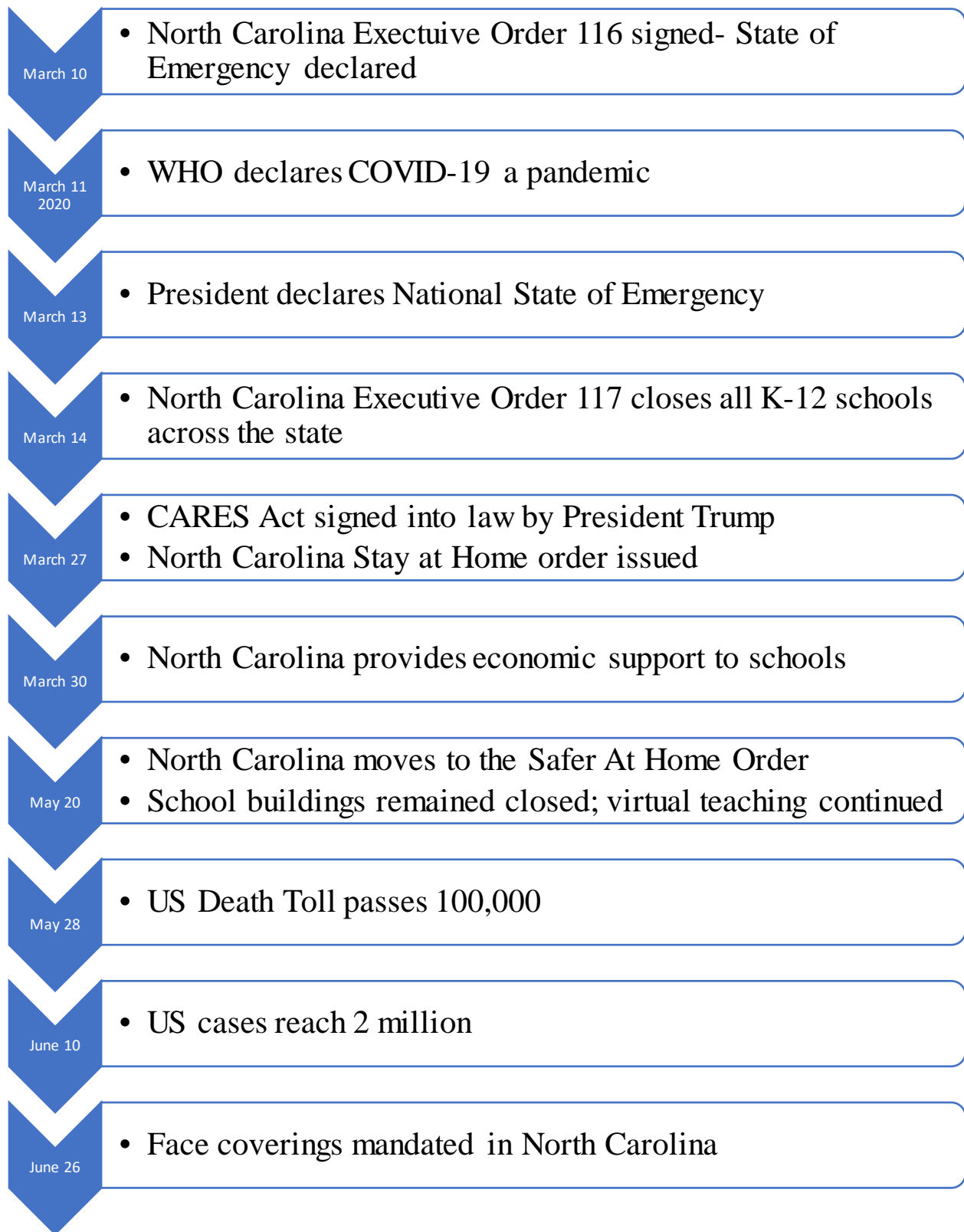


Figure 2. COVID-19 timeline in US and North Carolina (2020).

trauma refers to any experience in a child's life that leaves a feeling of hopelessness, fearing for safety and/or survival *or* fearing for the safety and survival of a loved one (Soma & Allen, 2018). In addition to the fears of contracting the potentially fatal virus, several health consequences could result from the COVID-19 pandemic, including anxiety, apathy, and loneliness (Zaharieva, 2020). Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic could be characterized as a childhood traumatic event, which necessitates schools to consider adapting practices and implementing new protocols to effectively meet the school-wide challenges of youth affected academically, emotionally, and behaviorally by this global event. While it is reasonable to assume that the majority of students are affected in some way by the events surrounding the pandemic, vulnerable youth could be affected more significantly due to the challenges they already face on a daily basis and may need more intense intervention to mitigate these increased challenges.

Due to the sudden and drastic nature of the pandemic and the effects on the educational environment, consideration needed to be given to implementing practices that address the most urgent priorities in responsive and supportive ways. One approach was the creation of a social and emotional learning framework to build understanding of the effects of trauma to create environments that respond appropriately to the unique academic and behavioral needs of youth affected by such events (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). To meet the social and emotional needs of elementary-aged students during a global pandemic required consideration of the isolating nature of a quarantine as well as how the closing of schools impacted a sense of connection and engagement in school activities.

There are several social and emotional practices that create positive and welcoming school cultures and build connections within a school. These include a Positive Behavior

Intervention System, or PBIS, trauma-sensitive schools, and restorative justice practices. The purpose of PBIS is to have a positive impact on school climate as well as reduce discipline events (Bradshaw et al., 2008). A trauma sensitive school “uses the components of PBIS and SEL to help children achieve self-regulatory behaviors, make positive connections with others, and develop self-esteem” (Craig & Stevens, 2016). Restorative justice practices are implemented as an alternative to exclusionary discipline practices and aim to build positive relationships within the school (Ashley & Burke, 2009).

This study set out to find solutions to compounding issues at West Elementary, (a pseudonym), located in Western County, North Carolina, also a pseudonym. West Elementary identified a population of students considered to be vulnerable, who display at-risk characteristics, and who are impacted by the debilitating effects of the coronavirus pandemic. The focus of this study was the implementation of a social and emotional learning framework to mentor identified vulnerable youth isolated in a remote learning environment as a result of the coronavirus pandemic as a potential solution.

Vulnerable, at-risk youth face a myriad of challenges in the home environment that can impact success in life. For this population, the resources within the school building often support these students when the home environment is not able. When school buildings closed as a result of the pandemic, access to resources and supports was limited, and the virtual learning environments for many of the vulnerable youth became grossly inadequate compared to that of their peers. As a result, students may require more intensive levels of intervention and support to mitigate the enhanced challenges caused by the pandemic.

The rest of this chapter will detail the structure of the study designed to diminish these issues and bring increased equitable moments into the virtual “classroom” of vulnerable, at-risk

youth. This chapter will also expand on the background and context of the study as well as the demographics of the site in which the study takes place. It will outline the questions guiding this study, detail the inquiry process, and explore the theoretical foundation and conceptual frameworks that are applied to this study. The significance of this study as it relates to advancing equity and educational practices is highlighted at the end of Chapter 1.

Background of Focus of Practice

Beginning in March of 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic necessitated quarantines and, as a result, closed all school buildings for an undisclosed amount of time. The quarantine necessitated a shelter-in-place, with residents only able to leave home for essential travel. Most people were required to work from home, including teachers. Teachers immediately began instructing students virtually. With the length of the quarantine undetermined, educators scrambled to find ways to facilitate instruction from their own homes as well as teach to students who lacked access to curriculum workbooks, textbooks, or technological devices, like Google Chromebooks, tablets or student laptops. A press release from the Economic Policy Institute (2020) highlights the challenges that 55 million children were facing as a result of the quarantine, naming lack of internet and essential supplies as one large challenge. Editors stated that these challenges were greater for students living in poverty, in rural areas, or for minority children. Many educators were also unprepared to support the needs of students in virtual learning environments, with many unknown challenges surfacing consistently and very few resources to find solutions (Berwick, 2020). In addition, many educators struggled to manage the stressors that resulted from this type of traumatic event. In an April 2020 article in *Education Week*, the author summarizes the experience of teachers in *Exhausted and Grieving: Teaching During the Coronavirus Crisis*:

That exhaustion emerges from a tangle of dynamics. Teachers are grappling with unfamiliar technologies. They have to retrofit—or reinvent—their lessons and find new ways to do familiar things, like grading homework. They’re inundated with emails, texts, and calls from principals, parents, and students. They’re trying to “be there” for students and their families. And many are also juggling the needs of their own children or other loved ones while managing their own coronavirus fears (Gewertz, 2020).

As a result of schools and childcare facilities closing within the state, students were required to stay at home, but attend school on-line. At the elementary level, many students are too young to be self-directed learners. They required guidance from a parent or older sibling who could provide a supportive learning environment that includes a clear understanding of curriculum and successful navigation of technology platforms. The amount of home-support varied greatly from home to home, and the students that had the fewest home resources seemed to be the students characterized as vulnerable or presented with at-risk characteristics. It appeared these deficits created even greater inequitable environments and fewer opportunities for equal access to curriculum for students at West Elementary.

For the vulnerable students, for those with limited financial resources, or even those that were in rural areas with low connectivity, access to reliable internet or devices made attending class a challenge. Additionally, many of these students displayed higher numbers of absences. State assessments were also suspended at the end of the year as a result of these challenges.

When the state waived accountability measures, participation and work completion became even more sporadic, with less than half of all students at West Elementary School consistently participating in the learning opportunities presented by teachers from March 2020 to

June 2020. The term “consistent participation” was defined by Western County Public Schools as participation in online learning opportunities in any subject area more than twice in a week.

With the lower levels of participation, combined with the less than adequate resources to instruct virtually, instruction that took place during remote learning centered around academics. Teachers at West Elementary attempted to adapt practices to proficiently deliver academic instruction in a virtual setting, and they struggled to adequately support the social and emotional learning needs of students. There was little or no attention given to non-academic, social and emotional skills.

Supporting social and emotional needs of students in a typical elementary setting is important as it improves academics and life outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). Because of this, supporting the social and emotional needs of youth during a life event that is characterized as traumatic becomes an even greater priority. For youth who are already characterized as vulnerable or those who display at-risk characteristics as a result of previously unstable home conditions, supporting the social and emotional needs of these youth becomes paramount.

The compounding issues at West Elementary School seemed to stem from an absence of a social and emotional framework, and the unforeseen pandemic drastically complicated the situation. The prioritization of social and emotional practices at West Elementary was initiated pre-pandemic, and the school improvement team adjusted the master schedule to include social and emotional practices like a morning meeting time and enhanced professional development. A morning meeting is a time set aside at the start of each day for the class to focus on social and emotional skill development, interact and converse with peers, and build relationships with each other (Williams, 2018). With these types of changes in motion prior to the school building closing, West Elementary School already prioritized social and emotional learning.

Implementation of a school-wide system to facilitate learning and make connections would have been appropriate and could have been a logical next-step. However, with school buildings closed, the ability to implement a large-scale initiative was hindered. A more focused initiative to target students considered vulnerable presented as a more logical focus given the current educational environment. At West Elementary, the implementation of a social and emotional framework in a virtual environment to target students that display at-risk characteristics could address a myriad of increasing social and emotional needs.

Context of Study

Demographics

This study took place at West Elementary School in Central North Carolina. West Elementary School (WES) is one of 24 Pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade elementary schools out of 46 total schools within Western County Public Schools (WCPS), a pseudonym for the 7th largest school district in the state. Western County Public Schools is comprised of over 37,000 students with high levels of growth. There are over 45 languages spoken in the district. The demographics include a population of white students at 52.2% and the other half of the population is a combination of minority students. Table 2 displays the ethnic breakdown of the student population within Western County Public Schools and at West Elementary School.

Only 25% of the students that attend West Elementary School are considered to be Economically Disadvantaged (ED) students. Economically Disadvantaged students are those that qualify for free meals or reduced-price meals from school based on the amount of annual family income under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program (Kids Count, 2020). A school must have at least 40% of the average daily membership (ADM) identified as economically disadvantaged in order to be deemed a Title 1 school and receive Title 1 funding.

Table 2

Racial Demographics of Student Population of WCPS and WES

Ethnic Group	Percentage in WCPS	Percentage at WES
White	52.2%	51%
Hispanic	25.7%	15%
African American	15.8%	22%
Multi-Racial	5.1%	10%
Other Asian, American Indian, or Pacific Islander	1.2%	2%

Average daily membership, as defined by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, is the total number of days in membership within a term (*Student Accounting Data*, 2020). Title 1 is a category of federal funding allocated to schools for children from low-income families based on this figure. The amount of Title 1 funding allocated to schools is derived from a mathematical formula calculated by the number of students and the amount of funding allotted per pupil (*The NCES Fast Facts Tool*, 2019).

The purpose of this funding is to ensure equity in school experience to those students who come from homes with economic disadvantages. These funds are provided to mitigate the gaps that exist with curriculum, assessments, and instruction between students and schools with appropriate funding and those that are financially disadvantaged (*Title I - Improving The Academic Achievement Of The Disadvantaged*, 2005). With only 25% of the ADM at West Elementary School characterized as economically disadvantaged, the school does not receive financial assistance. This type of assistance could be used to purchase resources and human capital to mitigate the cognitive issues, poorer academic performance, and non-cognitive struggles associated with poverty (Morsy & Rothstein, 2015).

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support

West Elementary implemented a Positive Behavior Intervention and Support structure (PBIS) six years prior to the closing of schools in March 2020. This framework focused on creating a positive school culture that is the result of implementing a common language of expectations and rewarding students for meeting those expectations (Sailor et al., 2008). Since the structure was put into place six years ago, a common language is used throughout the school, consistent processes are in place, and schoolwide rewards and celebrations are part of the school culture.

One method to measure teacher perception of PBIS is the Teacher Working Conditions Survey, which is an anonymous survey that assesses teacher perception of various elements of the workplace. The Teacher Working Conditions survey indicated that from 2016 to survey administration in spring of 2019, there was a significant decline in the percentage of teachers at West Elementary School that supported PBIS.

A district-wide Panorama survey was administered in the fall of 2018 and again in the winter of 2019, measuring several factors related to social and emotional learning, including PBIS. Panorama is a survey platform created by Aperture, a company that creates ways to collect and organize data related to SEL to help positively impact and inform instruction (*Our Story*, 2020). The data was disaggregated at the school level. On both surveys, West Elementary School measured below the district average on questions that asked about effectiveness of the implementation of PBIS as a means to support social and emotional needs of students as well as reduce discipline incidents that are linked to conflict resolution.

When the same survey questions were administered in the winter of 2019, the district average declined, and an even larger gap was created between West Elementary School and district averages. Table 3 displays the data from this survey specific to questions surrounding the PBIS structures at West Elementary School. Given these trends, it would appear that the PBIS model in isolation is not adequately meeting the social and emotional needs of the students at West Elementary School.

Social and Emotional Learning

At a district level, steps were taken to bring awareness to the social-emotional movement. All School Improvement Plans within the district for the 2019-2020 school year were required to include a goal targeted at supporting the social and emotional needs of students. In the same year

Table 3

Favorable Responses Toward PBIS Implementation at West Elementary School

Test Window	Percent responding favorably to the PBIS structure (WCPS district)	Percent responding favorably to the PBIS structure (WES)	Difference between WCPS and WES percentages
Fall 2019	43%	29%	14
Winter 2019	41%	22%	19

Western County Public Schools established the position of Director of Social and Emotional Learning to support administrators in creating appropriate professional development activities for teachers, as well as building district-wide consistency with a continuum of social and emotional standards and indicators from grades pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. While no formal curriculum or program was adopted, and no funding was allocated, a voluntary and dynamic district committee was working in conjunction with a group of school psychologists to create proficiency statements and foundational level standards.

West Elementary School was chosen as one of four schools in the district to receive the support of a social and emotional interventionist based on survey data information, number of discipline incidents, and school environment information. At the time of application, West Elementary School had rising numbers of discipline incidents and increasing numbers of minority and economically disadvantaged students as compared to the previous school year but did not have an established school-wide social and emotional learning framework. This position supported a district-wide social and emotional program, including professional development centered around social and emotional competencies, as well as the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) process for behavior and academics.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction defines MTSS as “a multi-tiered framework which promotes school improvement through engaging, research-based academic and behavioral practices. MTSS uses data-driven problem-solving to maximize growth for all” (Integrated Academic & Behavior Systems, 2020). In Western County Public Schools, a Multi-Tiered System of Support is utilized to support differentiated instruction. The interventionist will collaborate with schools to implement MTSS interventions at the Tier I and Tier II level. The tiered level of intervention structure in MTSS is represented in Figure 3.

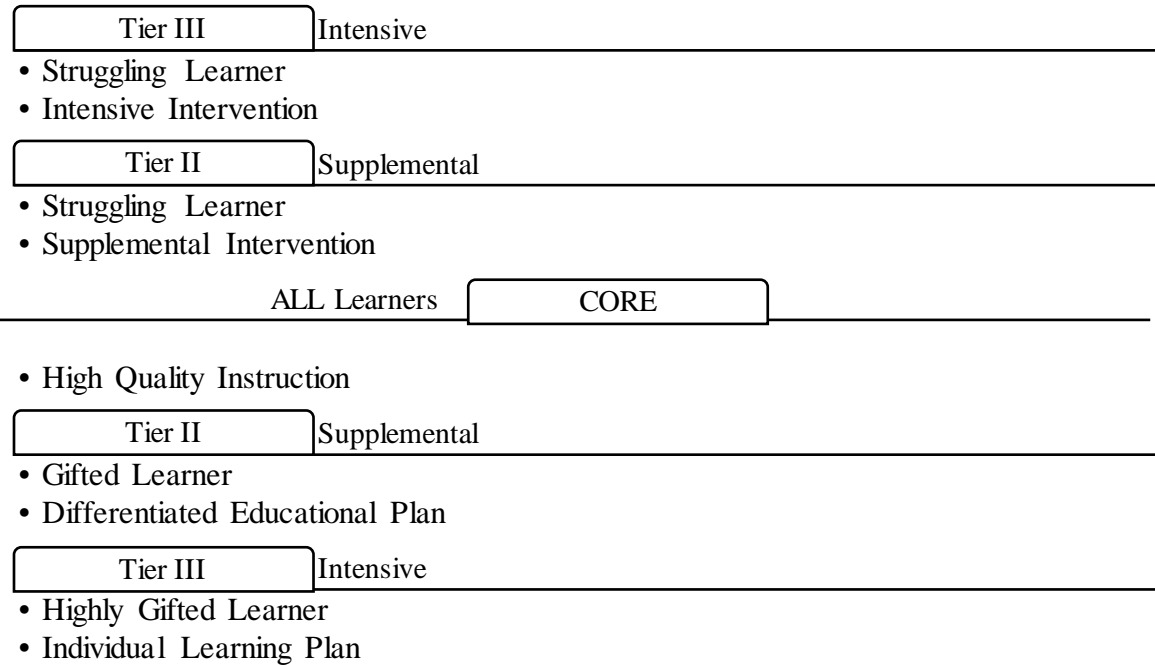


Figure 3. WCPS MTSS framework for academics and social and emotional learning.

Technology

At the start of the 2020-2021 school year, Western County Public Schools utilized federal funds allocated to public schools from the CARES Act for pandemic-related expenses to purchase technology for students. One device (laptop, Chromebook, tablet, etc.) would be given to any student in the district that needed one, so that every student had an individual device and would not need to share. Western County is a geographically large district with rural areas that do not have reliable connectivity. In addition, hotspot devices were also purchased and issued to students to provide internet connectivity in homes with financial limitations or connectivity obstacles.

Statement of Focus of Practice

The focus of practice in this study was the implementation of a social and emotional learning, online-mentoring framework to support identified vulnerable isolated youth in a remote learning environment as a result of the coronavirus, or COVID-19, pandemic. Social and emotional learning focuses on the development of the whole child, to include academics, behaviors, and emotions (Durlak et al., 2017). The rationale behind social and emotional learning is the belief that engagement and more rigorous learning occurs when the following three domains are engaged: cognitive, social and interpersonal, and emotional skills. These domains then influence beliefs and mindsets, which in turn shape character and values (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). In summary, social and emotional learning impacts student personalities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many school systems closed school buildings for indefinite periods of time. The closing necessitated that instruction take place in virtual environments. Students were isolated in homes and removed from the social experiences that normally occur within the school building. Students faced challenges accessing the curriculum,

routines were uprooted, and the danger of the health impacts of the virus created an atmosphere of uncertainty for students.

The COVID-19 pandemic, then characterized as a traumatic event, illuminated the need to consider the effects these events could have on learning. The impact of a traumatic event on a child varies greatly, as the way a child perceives the event is contingent upon the characteristics and experiences of the individual (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). A social and emotional framework can promote wellness during a time of crisis (CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2020c; Zins et al., 2007a).

Vulnerable youth already face a myriad of challenges in the academic setting without the added complication of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic shut down infrastructures that provided resources. Many vulnerable youth were quarantined in unstable environments. These students were isolated from school, a place that provides material, social, and emotional supports. For many, basic needs were not met during the quarantine. Applying Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory to this population, learning in remote environments presents issues of inequity for vulnerable youth, as these students have greater deficiency needs than that of their peers (McDaniel & Yarbrough, 2016).

At West Elementary School, social and emotional learning was considered a priority, but there was not a consistent framework for implementation. Meeting student need was a challenge, but meeting needs without resources while teaching in a virtual environment during a pandemic created even greater obstacles. The vulnerable youth and at-risk students, already at a disadvantage, seemed to fall farther and farther behind academically and behaviorally.

At West Elementary, a social and emotional learning framework with mentoring supports that targets vulnerable youth isolated in remote environments could be a leveling agent for the chasm that exists between those of affluence and those that are economically disadvantaged.

Focus of Practice Guiding Questions

The questions guiding this study are:

1. How is student engagement impacted by the implementation of a social and emotional mentoring framework for vulnerable youth isolated in a remote learning environment during a pandemic?
2. How is student connectedness impacted by the implementation of a social and emotional mentoring framework in a remote learning environment during a pandemic?
3. How does strategic professional development support staff in the ability to meet the needs of at-risk, vulnerable students?

Several instruments were used to collect the data necessary to appropriately answer each of these respective guiding questions. For guiding questions one and two, data was collected from the social and emotional learning profiles, the student self-assessment, the student surveys, as well as the two focus groups. Data was collected from the social and emotional student profiles and the Core Team focus group to analyze for guiding question three.

Overview of Inquiry

This was a mixed methods, action research study, framed around the theoretical foundations of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the Science of Learning and Development model. The conceptual frameworks from The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and the Youth Mentoring Model also establish the paradigm of the study.

This study was implemented in three phases. The first phase (Phase I) was planning and development with baseline data collection. The second phase (Phase II) was the implementation of the online social and emotional mentoring framework with small groups of students. This phase was segmented into three parts that align with the CASEL competencies. All three subsections encompassed weekly meetings, targeted instruction, independent activities, and data collection. The final phase of the study (Phase III) included the post implementation data collection and data analysis. An overview of the inquiry is summarized in Table 4.

Inquiry Partners

Collaborative inquiry as a research methodology was utilized in this study as a means of promoting reflective dialogue. This approach was important as “deep learning can come from individuals with varied experiences and levels of expertise who come together to engage in collective work” (Black, 2019, p. 228). This study engaged both Western County and West Elementary School employees as collaborative inquiry partners. Inquiry partners bring expertise at various stages of the study. The county level employees assisted with alignment to county directed goals and objectives. The West Elementary School staff ensured that the study aligned with the goals of the school improvement plan. The collaborative inquiry partners for this study are outlined in Table 5.

Theoretical Foundations

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is a motivational theory in psychology that states that deficiency needs must be satisfied before individuals can attend to growth needs (Maslow, 1943). Deficiency needs include those that are physiological and are needs centered around safety, love, or esteem. Growth needs are defined as self-actualization. Figure 4 depicts

Table 4

Phases of Implementation

Phase	Action	Data Collection
Phase I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot Study: focus group • Build and train SEL Core Team • Define characteristics of vulnerability • Select students • Obtain consent • Baseline data collection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot study focus group • Social and emotional profiles (pre-implementation) • Student Self-Assessment (pre-implementation)
Phase IIa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Meeting #1 Self-Awareness • Family Meeting #2 Self-Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core Team Focus Group data • Individual Student survey data
Phase IIb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Meeting #3 Social Awareness • Family Meeting #4 Relationship Skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core Team Focus Group data • Individual Student survey data
Phase IIc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Meeting #5 Responsible Decision Making • Family Meeting #6 Culminating Meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core Team Focus Group data • Individual Student survey data
Phase III	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEL Core Team focus group • Student focus groups • Social and emotional profiles (post-implementation) • Student Self-Assessment (post-implementation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEL Core Team focus group • Student focus groups • Social and emotional profiles (post-implementation) • Student Self-Assessment (post-implementation)

Table 5

Collaborative Inquiry Partners

Inquiry Partner	Role in Study
WCPS Director of Social and Emotional Learning	Ensure the study supports the mission and vision of Western County Public Schools.
WCPS SEL Interventionist	Reflective dialogue on both the scope and sequence of the study as well as the impact of each phase of implementation to inform scholarly practitioner.
WCPS Professional Development Coordinator	Reflective dialogue on the professional development of SEL Core Team
WES SEL Core Team	Reflective dialogue on impact of each phase of implementation to inform scholarly practitioner.
WES School Counselor	Communication with families of selected students.
WES ELL Teacher (English Language Learners)	Reflective dialogue surrounding equity of access to families of students participating in the study with language barriers.

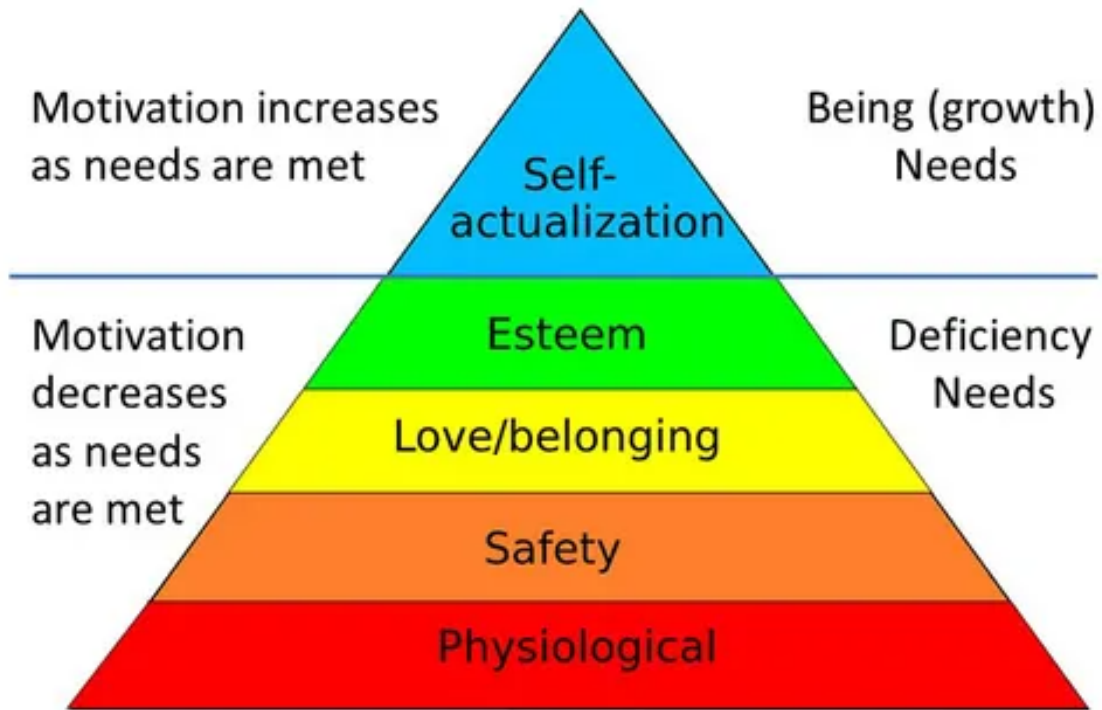


Figure 4. Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs Model.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This theory suggests that before learning can occur, the environment in which the student exists must be favorable, to include positive experiences early in life that establish a foundation to undertake more rigorous tasks later in life (Neto, 2015).

This theoretical foundation was important to consider when creating a social and emotional learning framework designed to support the needs of vulnerable, youth in a remote learning environment to ensure that instruction is appropriate, and the needs of students are effectively addressed. Vulnerable, at-risk youth are defined as students that have a deficiency; therefore, it is important to recognize these deficiencies and consider the types of needs of each of these students. Then it is possible to determine the order in which needs are addressed. In doing this, it is possible to create a supportive environment for learning (McLeod, 2018). If attention is not given to first assessing whether basic and psychological needs are met, then learning might not occur. In addition, the effect of implementation of any type of intervention could be ineffective (Noltemeyer et al., 2012). This framework and the implications within this study will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Science of Learning and Development Model

The Science of Learning and Development (SoLD) Model is a synthesis of research surrounding educational practice across several fields. This model organizes the types of learning experiences that support the development of the whole child that include academic, cognitive, ethical, physical, psychological, and social and emotional domains (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The concepts within the Science of Learning and Development Model are organized in Figure 5.

The SoLD Model is organized into four over-arching segments (supportive environment, productive instructional strategies, social and emotional development, and system of supports)



Figure 5. SoLD Model.

that combine to create a comprehensive learning environment. This model supports the concept that learning is connected to all contexts, is influenced by the experiences and interactions within a child's life, and therefore learning is a personal and individualized process (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). This model was important in this study as it established the foundation that a learning environment should be built upon relationships and attachments, be supportive of student ability to make connections, and develop skills needed to interact with others and create supports across all domains. Vulnerable youth often lack positive relationships and connections (McDaniel & Yarbrough, 2016), therefore a social and emotional framework built to support vulnerable youth would need to address these deficits.

Conceptual Frameworks

CASEL Social and Emotional Framework

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social and emotional learning as how children and adults learn to understand and manage emotions, set goals, show empathy for others, establish positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020a).

CASEL identifies five core competencies in social and emotional learning that include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. These are organized into a graphic, represented in Figure 6.

The CASEL wheel suggests that these five competencies can be applied in the classroom, within the school, and in other outside environments. Application of these CASEL competencies would be applied in this study as a conceptual framework. This study is designed to support at-risk, vulnerable youth isolated in remote learning environments as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Students that are considered at-risk often lack appropriate social and

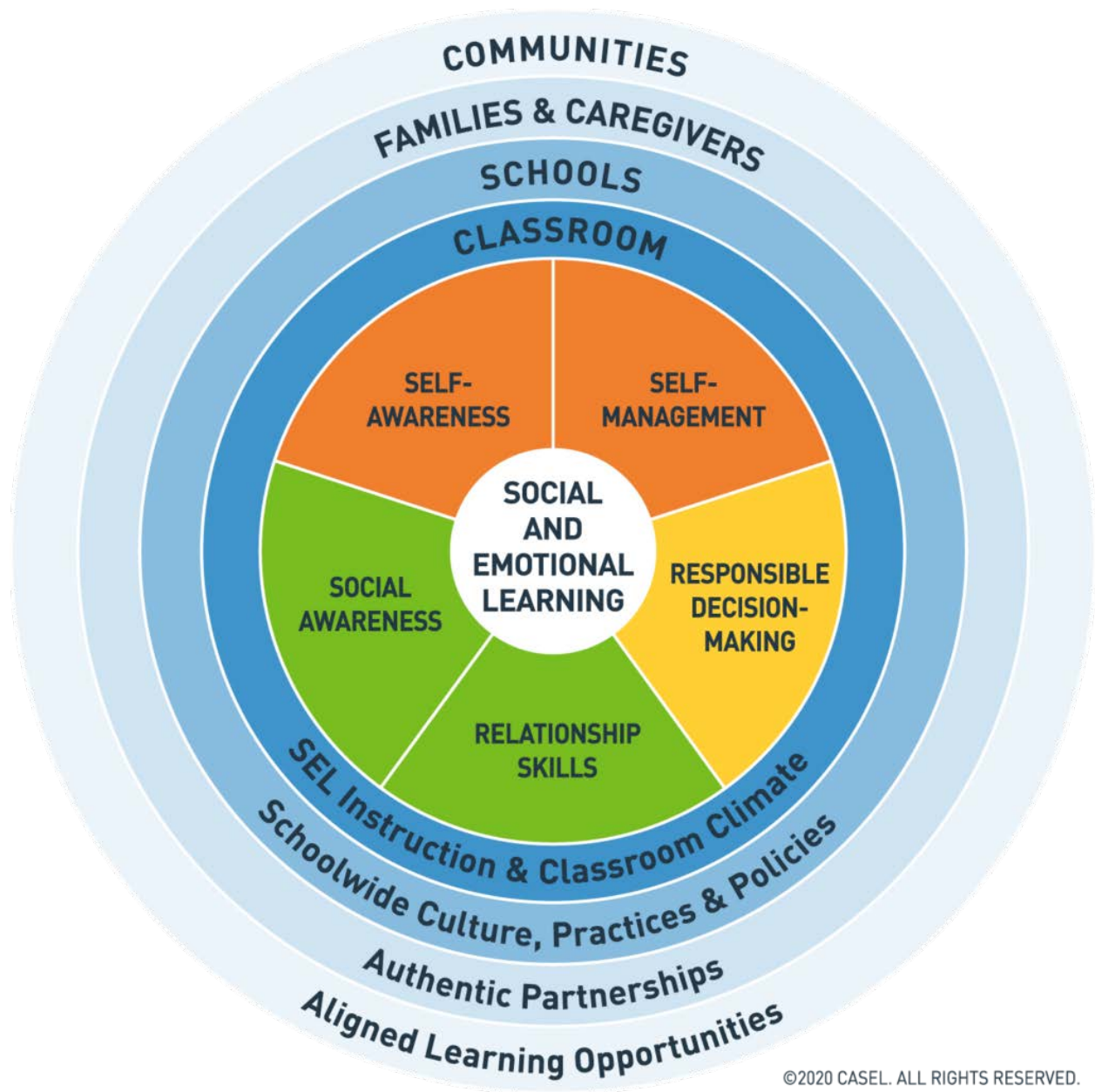


Figure 6. CASEL wheel of social and emotional learning competencies.

emotional skills, which can impede a student's ability to function successfully (McDaniel & Yarbrough, 2016; Oldenfield et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2015; Terzian et al., 2011).

Research indicated that effective implementation of social and emotional learning skills yields positive academic results and can also reduce bullying, alleviate chronic absenteeism, support trauma-informed practice, support students that need intervention plans or Individualized Educational Plans, as well as promote equity for students that present with deficiencies (Aperture Education, 2019; CASEL, 2020a; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2017). The CASEL social and emotional framework would provide justification for the assumption that social and emotional development can be nurtured and should be developed in a systematic way (CASEL, 2020c) as well as serving as a critical practice for promoting equity and an anti-biased education for at-risk, vulnerable youth (Scharf, 2018). This conceptual framework and applications are explored in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Youth Mentoring Model

The Youth Mentoring Model (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008) supports the idea that mentoring can foster positive developmental outcomes. The engagement between a caring adult and youth creates a connection which forges a personal relationship where both parties are invested in the outcome. A mentoring relationship can lead to positive change in behavioral and academic outcomes. Then outcomes of the mentoring relationship are impacted by several factors that include the mentor selection and training, the level of risk factors associated with the mentee, and the intensity of relationship between mentor and mentee (Lakind et al., 2015; Larose & Tarabulsky, 2014; Montgomery, 2017). Figure 7 summarizes the impact of the mentoring relationship within the Youth Mentoring Model.

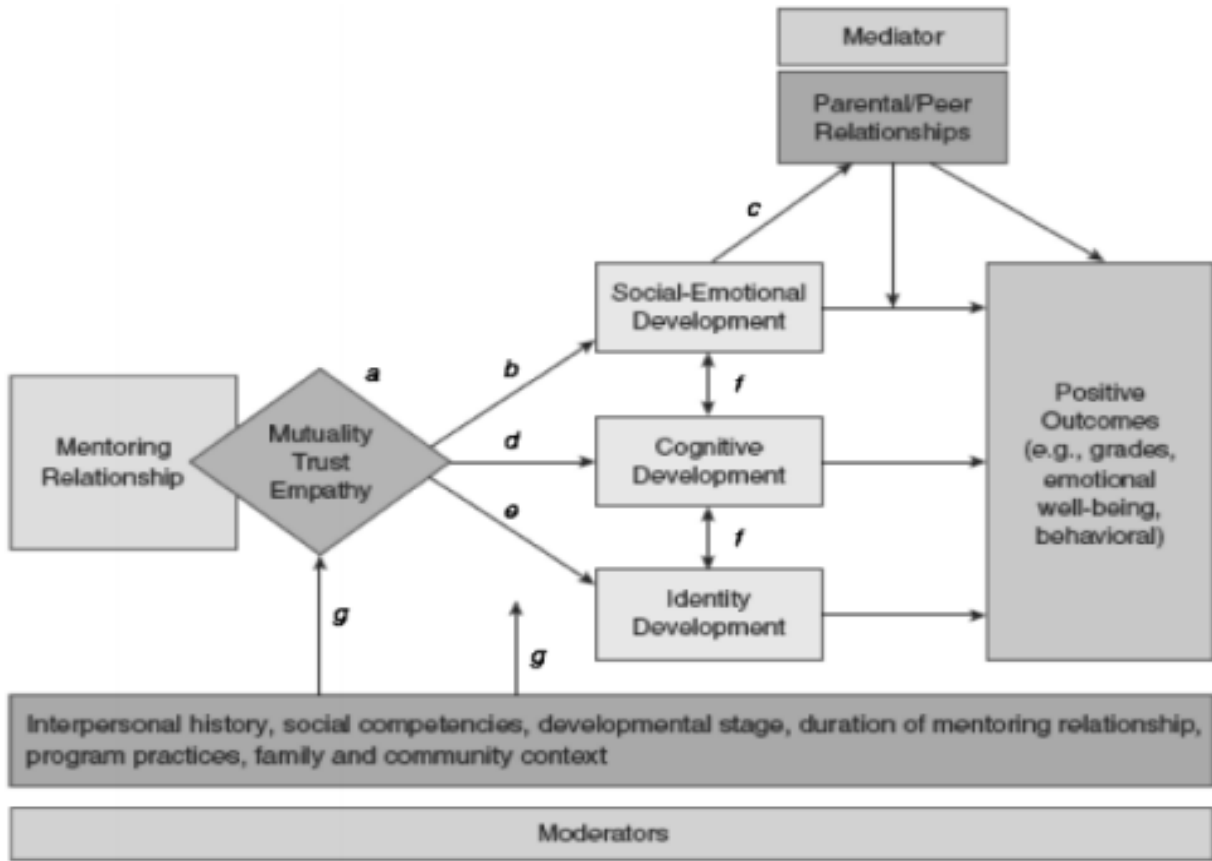


Figure 7. Youth Mentoring Model.

This conceptual framework supported the development of smaller learning communities, referred to as families. Teacher leaders, referred to as Core Team members led each family meeting and served as the formal mentor role for each group of students. Consideration was given during the selection and pairing of students and staff, as the relationship could create variance in the outcome of the effectiveness of implementation.

Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms are defined to ensure clarity of the information presented throughout the study:

At-Risk: This term encompasses a myriad of factors that would contribute towards a student being labeled a concern for academic or social and emotional success. These factors can stem from internal issues - developmental, emotional, behavioral – and/or external issues - unstable family, poverty, abuse (Larose & Tarabulsy, 2014).

Connectedness: the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported in the school social environment (Goodenow, 1993).

COVID-19: a respiratory illness caused by the coronavirus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in January 2020. The virus became a global health crisis, necessitated quarantines, infecting over 2 million in just the United States in less than a year (CDC, 2019).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): a federal law passed in 2015 that governs public education in the United States. It replaced *No Child Left Behind*. The primary purpose of ESSA is to make sure public schools provide a quality education for all students, including achievement of disadvantaged students (Lee, 2019).

Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS): an evidence based, three-tiered framework for improving and integrating all of the data, systems, and practices affecting student outcomes every day to create an environment where all students are successful (PBIS, n.d.).

Professional Development: teachers' learning, how they learn and how they apply their newly acquired knowledge in practice (Avalos, 2011)

Remote Learning Environment: an online learning environment that allows teachers and students to communicate, interact, collaborate, and share ideas (Heubeck, 2020).

Social and Emotional Learning:

- an “umbrella term” that describes many efforts and concepts and the specifics of successful implementation that is widely debated as programs vary in a multitude of ways including curriculum design, skill focus, competencies, and teaching strategies (Zins et al., 2007b).
- a conceptual framework that displays how children and adults learn to understand and manage emotions, set goals, show empathy for others, establish positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2020a).
- the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2020a).
- set of social, emotional, behavioral, and character skills that support the success in school, the workplace, relationships, and the community (Frey et al., 2019).

Student Engagement: the active commitment and purposeful effort expended by students towards all aspects of their learning, including both formal and informal (Boulton et al., 2019).

This can include the following domains: behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, and academic engagement (Lee, 2013).

Trauma: an acute or chronic life event that threatens one's physical or emotional well-being (Perfect et al., 2016).

Trauma-Informed Practice: an approach that realizes the impact of trauma, recognizes the symptoms of trauma, and responds by integrating knowledge of trauma informed policies and practices that focus on six key concepts: safety, trust, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural/gender issues (Phifer & Hull, 2016).

Trauma Sensitive Schools: a school structure that provides social and emotional support rather than traditional discipline approaches that isolate and can be potentially re-traumatizing (Phifer & Hull, 2016).

Vulnerable Youth: a person under the age of 18 who lacks material, emotional, or social supports which makes them susceptible for poorer outcomes in life when compared to peers (Shah et al., 2015; Skinner et al., 2006).

Youth Mentor: an adult who provides guidance to a student. A relationship is built between the adult and youth and the context of the relationship is centered around improving academic performance and behavior (Larose & Tarabulsy, 2014).

Assumptions

There were two assumptions made throughout this study. The first assumption was that all teachers understand the concept of social and emotional learning and believe that social and emotional learning is beneficial to students. Therefore, when examining the data collected from this action research study, it was assumed that all teachers understood and implemented the

social and emotional structures with fidelity and that staff engaged in authentic participation with the students as a mentor.

The second assumption was that the students would participate in the entire scope of the study. The theoretical foundations and conceptual frameworks identified in this study establish the need to foster relationships and connections with this population of vulnerable youth in order to effectively mitigate the deficiencies they presented. The span of this study was a mere six weeks, and all the time allocated would be needed to establish trusting relationships within the family.

Scope and Delimitations

This study was designed to measure impact of a social and emotional learning framework for vulnerable students isolated in remote learning environments precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This study engaged only with students that are identified as vulnerable or characterized as at-risk, per the criteria set forth by the staff at West Elementary School. This study only engaged with those students that are in a remote learning environment at West Elementary School. Therefore, this study was delimited to West Elementary School and results may not be applicable to other schools.

Limitations

This action research study is taking place at West Elementary School where I, the scholarly practitioner of this study, am also the administrator. As such, by conducting the focus groups, answers from participants could be impacted. To mitigate this, the members of the Core Team conducted the family meeting and administered the student surveys during implementation. I conducted the student focus groups during post implementation, but also had

members of the SEL Core Team present to mitigate any discomfort or uncertainty on the part of the student as a result of my role as the principal.

This study was designed for implementation during a pandemic. Due to the unpredictability of a pandemic, fluctuations could occur in learning environment and the depth of implementation, consistency from participants, frequency in meetings, or availability of resource could be impacted. In an attempt to mitigate the potential limitations of the pandemic on the educational environment, the family meetings were held in virtual environments with the hope that students would be able to participate regardless of outside circumstances. In addition, two Core Team members were a part of each family in the event sickness impacts any member of the adult participants in the study.

The final limitation is the lack of scholarly research surrounding the educational impact of implementation of academic or social and emotional skills during a pandemic. This study aimed to fill the gap in research as there is little evidence to support approaches to mitigate challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Significance of Inquiry

The purpose of this study was to measure the impacts of a social and emotional learning, on-line mentoring framework on vulnerable elementary youth in response to the isolation of virtual learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study was designed to target a specific student population. However, if data from this study supported favorable outcomes, the intent would be to broaden the scope of implementation.

The results of this study could establish a foundation of literature in support of students affected by the pandemic. This study was designed to take place during the pandemic, which can present challenges in implementation, but sets an environment to collect data that is timely and

authentic. This study incorporated opportunities for quantitative and qualitative data collection to link findings to practices that can potentially decrease the level of trauma associated with a pandemic, promote wellness, maximize learning in unstable learning environments, and address learning needs of the whole child.

Advancing Equity and Social Justice

With school buildings closed and instruction taking place in virtual environments, the inequity in education became more evident. Some school systems lacked the ability to equip teachers with the training, skills, and tools needed to facilitate learning in remote environments, and students felt the effects. While the math and reading curricula included online learning platforms, the lack of devices and internet access in high poverty and rural areas was an obstacle when attempting to provide synchronous learning environments. For the families, communities, and students that rely on schools to provide levels of support deeper than academic, many were left without valuable resources needed to support the whole child. Many schools within the district had to provide meals, internet, and social and emotional support in addition to facilitating learning.

The implementation of a social and emotional learning framework with mentoring supports attempted to mitigate the lack of access to an equitable academic curriculum for certain subgroups of students. For vulnerable, at-risk students, a social and emotional learning framework designed to meet deficiency needs as well as build a mentoring relationship with a stable adult centered around research-based practices could increase equity in access to a supportive education for a population that lacks these resources.

The data collected from this study can inform practices for creating systems of supports to individualize services for students that bring unique challenges to school. Even though the

potential long-term impact of trauma as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic is unknown at this time, research indicates that social and emotional learning as an embedded component of school curriculum positively impacts the trajectory of school and career (CASEL, 2020a).

Advances in Practice

The findings from this study may be beneficial at the school and district level with the potential to influence social and emotional approaches throughout K-12 education. This study could improve the limited scholarly research on meeting the academic and social and emotional needs of students during a pandemic or meeting the social and emotional needs of vulnerable, at-risk youth. If outcomes indicated a positive impact for at-risk students, this practice could be replicated at other schools that also have vulnerable youth in remote learning environments.

At West Elementary School, the findings from this study helped teachers and other support staff at West Elementary School meet the social and emotional needs of students in response to a variety of situations, including many types of trauma and other significant life events, potentially creating limitless opportunities to meet students where and when their needs present.

Summary

Social and emotional learning is a process that can support every type of student in the acquisition of skills to manage emotions, maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019). There are numerous benefits to integrating social and emotional learning into schools and several groups, including The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), The National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (National SEAD Commission), and The Aspen Institute have created resources for successful implementation into traditional school settings with face to face

instruction. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were forced to close in many places across the United States. For those educators, the closing necessitated immediate adjustments to practices for delivering curriculum. With the current health crisis still unfolding without any certainty as to when it will subside, responding to the social and emotional needs of students in remote learning environments during a pandemic is a critical next step. This study aimed to identify the social and emotional practices that are beneficial for a population of vulnerable students that are isolated in a remote learning environment. This population of vulnerable youth face additional challenges in traditional face to face classroom settings, without the struggles that are compounded as a result of COVID-19.

The next chapter will expand on the research behind the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that establish the paradigm for this study. The chapter will explore the existent literature germane to social and emotional learning and social and emotional learning frameworks. The chapter will focus on deeper exploration of the challenges of vulnerable, at-risk youth and the impacts of traumatic events during childhood. The concepts of trauma-sensitive schools and mentoring as support systems for these students will establish research-based approaches for the focus of practice. Finally, student engagement and connectedness, and the importance of professional development will be outlined in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to measure the impacts of an on-line social and emotional framework with mentoring supports on vulnerable elementary youth in response to the isolation of virtual learning as a result of the coronavirus, or COVID-19, pandemic. This chapter examines two theoretical foundations as well as two conceptual frameworks that serve as lenses through which this study is explained and analyzed. Both Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the Science of Learning and Development model served as crucial theories relative to this study's focus on vulnerable youth. The conceptual framework from the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) model, as well as the Youth Mentoring model, significantly influenced the mitigation plan proposed to meet the social and emotional needs of vulnerable youth isolated in remote learning environments.

Additionally, this chapter provides a review of existent literature on social and emotional learning and the expansive impact of the movement in support of SEL. The review outlines the research surrounding the challenges of vulnerable, at-risk youth in learning environments. This chapter also examines the literature surrounding the types of trauma that can impact childhood, details the effects of trauma in an educational setting, and gives consideration to the traumatic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on childhood. The role of trauma-sensitive practices in schools and mentoring as support systems for vulnerable youth outline the foundation for mitigation of academic, social, and emotional challenges. Deeper exploration of the topics of engagement and connectedness establish a premise for the questions guiding this study and quality professional development is detailed in this chapter.

Theoretical Foundations and Conceptual Frameworks

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory states that all humans have five basic types of needs: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization, and that these needs are the foundation for intrinsic motivation (Maslow, 1943). Maslow (1963) later revised this model and expanded it to include three other growth needs in addition to self-actualization. The final model includes eight levels total with the addition of cognitive needs, aesthetic needs, and transcendence to the top half of the pyramid. The original theory is represented in Figure 4 and the most comprehensive and current model of the theory is illustrated in Figure 8.

The lowest of the growth needs, cognition, focuses on developing the ability to know and understand, while the aesthetic level develops appreciation for symmetry, order, and beauty. The highest level, transcendence, is the ability to empathize and seek "edifying" information (Huitt, 2007). The upper levels of the model are complex, and fulfillment is an individualized path (Kenrick et al., 2010).

While both models postulate that deficiency needs must be met prior to fulfilling growth needs, Maslow (1943) initially proposed that progress to the next level only occurs when needs are fully met, but later clarified that a deficit only needs to be reasonably fulfilled before progression to the next level. He also recognized that an individual can be motivated by more than one need at a time (McLeod, 2018; Noltemeyer et al., 2012).

This theory is foundational for understanding the motivation of at-risk, vulnerable youth, as this theory clarifies that behaviors and personality correlate to the gratification or deprivation of needs (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). Maslow proposed that if a deficiency is present, an

MASLOW'S MOTIVATION MODEL

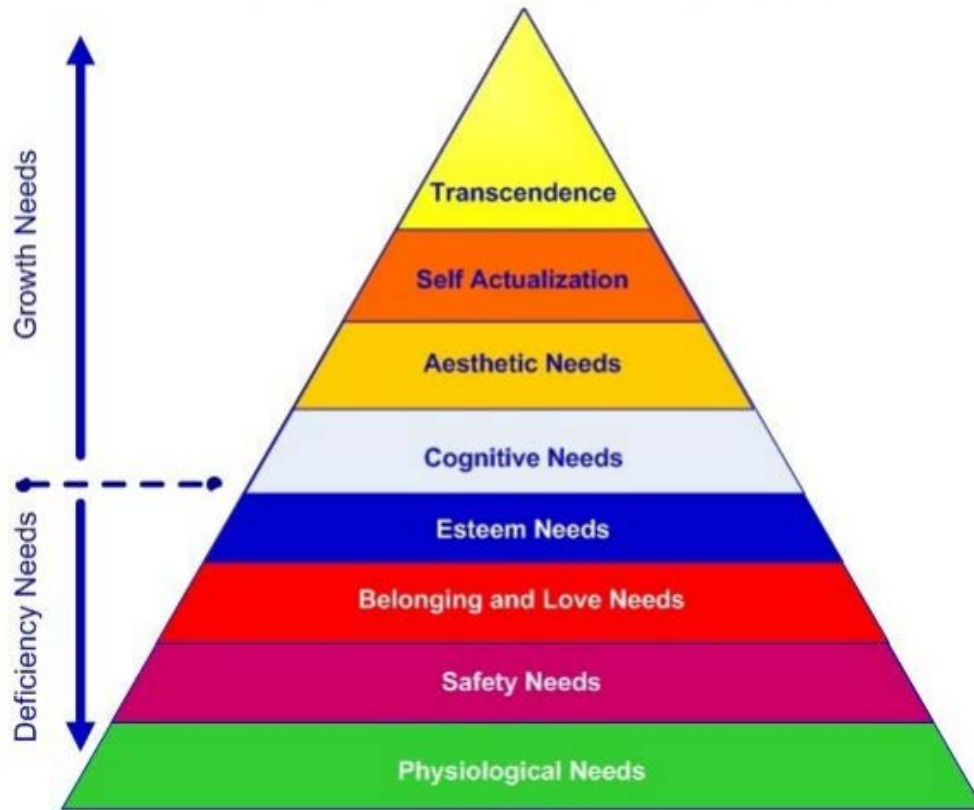


Figure 8. Maslow's (1963) Hierarchy of Needs Model.

individual's behaviors will focus on removing the deficiency (Huitt, 2007). At a basic level, students who have unmet physiological needs will focus on coping skills or those students who do not feel safe will focus on creating a protective environment and all other information is left unattended (Huitt, 2007; Noltemeyer et al., 2012). Students who have deficiency needs at the love and esteem levels will need to receive fulfillment in a classroom with a supportive environment (Huitt, 2007).

While this theory does not provide a unitary explanation regarding motivation or behavior, there is a relationship between deficiency needs and learning outcomes. Research supports that fulfilling deficiency needs has some impact on growth needs. Within the educational environment, focus should be placed on several interrelated developmental domains, including physical and mental health and social-emotional behaviors in order to optimize school performance (McLeod, 2018; Noltemeyer, 2012).

Science of Learning and Development Model (SoLD)

The Science of Learning and Development Model represents the outcomes of a meta-analysis across multiple learning sciences and branches of educational research designed to solidify best practices for creating optimal learning environments. This model is designed to support the development of the whole child. Each section of the graphic is an interrelated component that builds a framework to support the well-being of a child across multiple contexts. The outer section of the graphic is organized into four domains: supportive environment, productive instructional strategies, social and emotional development, and system of supports (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The middle section focuses on classroom practices that support

acquisition of knowledge. Both the outer and middle sections outline practices and interventions identified to be highly effective strategies for supporting the growth and development of the whole child, targeted in the center section. These ideas are represented in Figure 5.

The model also integrates culturally responsive strategies to promote equity in the educational environment as it focuses on organizational reform by identifying changes that need to be made within the current educational system that are outdated, ineffective, and dysfunctional (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The implications from this model are effective educational practices should be designed in a manner that supports learning across multiple domains.

Schools can be organized around developmentally supportive relationships, coherent and well-integrated approaches to supports, including home and school connections, well scaffolded instruction that intentionally supports the development of social, emotional, and academic skills, habits, mindsets, and culturally competent, personalized responses to the assets and needs that each individual child presents (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, p. 133).

While full implementation would have the potential to be costly and limited by external factors, aligning as many educational practices with elements from this model support research based and data-driven implementation practices that are viable and support an anti-biased education.

This model was important to the study as it frames understanding around the role that social and emotional learning play in growth and development. The Science of Learning and Development model presents social and emotional learning as one of four essential foundational elements required to support the whole child. For the purpose of this study, the SoLD model supported the concept that social and emotional learning should be systemic and integrated into the school day.

The CASEL Social and Emotional Learning Framework

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning framework identifies the skills needed to effectively meet the challenges of managing personal emotions and behaviors as well as the ability to successfully interact with others (CASEL, 2020a). These competencies are organized into five areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making and are organized in Figure 9.

CASEL was formed in 1994 and the five competencies were created as part of the CASEL framework to assist schools in aligning practices that meet the needs of students in the classroom and outside of the academic environment (CASEL, 2020b). This framework is important to this study for several reasons. The CASEL framework for systematic social and emotional learning can promote student development by increasing academic achievement, improving behavior, and by applying an equity lens within a school setting (CASEL, 2020b; Hoffman, 2009; Zins et al., 2007b). The five CASEL competencies were implemented in this study as research-based practices and were aligned with the themes for the first five family meetings. These themes helped to organize the systematic approach of the study and align with the behavior expectations of the study site at West Elementary School.

The CASEL framework was also important to this study as the five social and emotional learning competencies align with several critical practices necessary to foster healing and create supportive environments. These skills are organized to align with each CASEL competency so that they can be applied in response to traumatic events. These skills can be applied in response to a traumatic event, like the COVID-19 pandemic (CASEL, 2020c). Table 6 summarizes the alignment between the five competencies with skills that these competencies supported to promote wellness amidst the current pandemic.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) COMPETENCIES

SELF-AWARENESS

The ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a "growth mindset."

- ⇒ IDENTIFYING EMOTIONS
- ⇒ ACCURATE SELF-PERCEPTION
- ⇒ RECOGNIZING STRENGTHS
- ⇒ SELF-CONFIDENCE
- ⇒ SELF-EFFICACY

SELF-MANAGEMENT

The ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.

- ⇒ IMPULSE CONTROL
- ⇒ STRESS MANAGEMENT
- ⇒ SELF-DISCIPLINE
- ⇒ SELF-MOTIVATION
- ⇒ GOAL SETTING
- ⇒ ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

SOCIAL AWARENESS

The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

- ⇒ PERSPECTIVE-TAKING
- ⇒ EMPATHY
- ⇒ APPRECIATING DIVERSITY
- ⇒ RESPECT FOR OTHERS

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.

- ⇒ COMMUNICATION
- ⇒ SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT
- ⇒ RELATIONSHIP BUILDING
- ⇒ TEAMWORK

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.

- ⇒ IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS
- ⇒ ANALYZING SITUATIONS
- ⇒ SOLVING PROBLEMS
- ⇒ EVALUATING
- ⇒ REFLECTING
- ⇒ ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

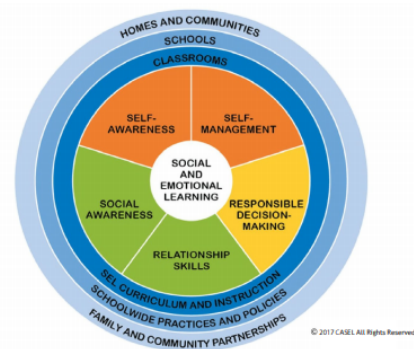


Figure 9. CASEL competencies.

Table 6

Coping Skills that Correlate with CASEL Competencies

Competency	Skills
Self-awareness	Processing complex emotions during a socially turbulent time.
Self-management	Coping with grief and loss and developing resiliency Express agency
Social awareness	Understanding the social context of the virus and the variations of impact of the virus
Relationship skills	Making connections across cultural lines with a focus on collective grief and struggle
Responsible decision making	Analyzing consequences of choices as it related to health and safety to promote

This study, generated to measure the impacts of a social and emotional framework on vulnerable elementary youth in response to the isolation of virtual learning as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, implemented learning activities that foster development of skills in these five areas.

The Youth Mentoring Model

The Youth Mentoring Model is built upon creating positive academic, behavioral, as well as social and emotional outcomes. Three areas that develop as a result of the mentoring relationship which create the positive outcomes are identity development, cognitive development, and social and emotional development. Figure 7 illustrates the connections between the mentoring relationship and the positive outcomes on academics and youth well-being.

This model proposed that positive outcomes for youth can result from implementation of the pathways within the model. The model presented three pathways for influence-social and emotional development, cognitive development, and identity development, and proposes that the extent of influence correlates to the number of processes that are implemented (DuBois & Karcher, 2014a). Through this lens, the importance of fostering positive relationships with vulnerable youth that present with at-risk characteristics as an established intervention emerged.

When considering the work of John Hattie (2017), relationships have a 0.52 effect on achievement. Therefore, building positive student-teacher relationships is a potentially effective approach to making a positive impact on student achievement. This model integrated relationship building within the social and emotional learning framework as a means to address the needs of vulnerable youth. The Youth Mentoring Model is important to consider in this study as it provided structure for implementation of social and emotional learning skills as an integrated part of the curriculum.

In summary, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory and the Science of Learning and Development Model set the foundation for the study. Maslow's theory established the premise that students have deficiencies that can impact the academic growth and social wellness if these deficiencies are not addressed. Maslow's theory helps to answer the question of *why* at-risk youth struggle. The Science of Learning and Development Model supported that learning does not happen in isolation, but that growth of the whole child – including academics as well as social and emotional growth – occurs when all four realms of the model (supportive environment, productive instructional strategies, social and emotional development, and system of support) are present. This model helped to understand *what* at-risk, vulnerable youth need to address the deficiencies.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and the Youth Mentoring Model establish a conceptual foundation for this study. The competencies of the CASEL model support *how* vulnerable, at-risk youth can receive *Supportive Environment, a System of Support, and Social and Emotional Development*—all elements from the SoLD model. The Youth Mentoring Model also supports the SoLD model, but more specifically provides an idea of *when* support would be best implemented. Figure 10 displays the integration of the four models into this study and established the paradigm for this study.

This study was designed to implement a social and emotional framework on vulnerable elementary youth in response to the isolation of the virtual learning environment. Effective social and emotional learning approaches follow sequence and are explicit (Durlak et al., 2011). The social and emotional framework in this study was built on the coalesced principles of four research-based frameworks focused on implementing systematic and focused solutions to the

The Paradigm

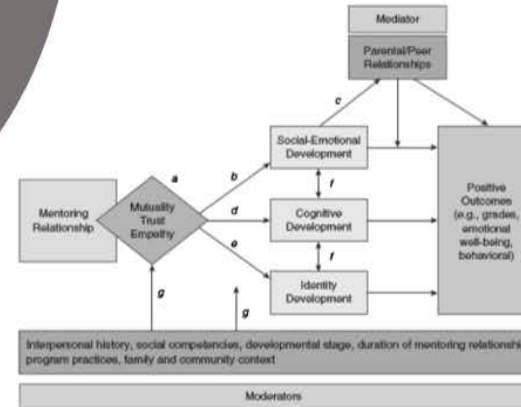
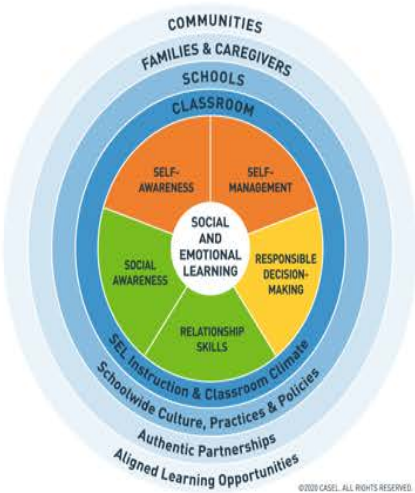
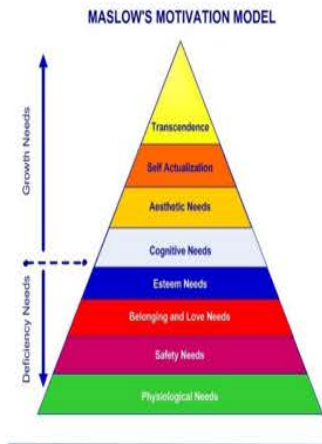


Figure 10. The paradigm.

issue of vulnerable, at-risk youth isolated in a remote learning environment as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, or COVID-19.

Literature Review

Social and Emotional Learning

Social and Emotional Learning Movement

The concept of social and emotional learning began taking shape in the late 1960s when Dr. James Comer, a resident at the Yale University Child Study Center, developed a process for improving the school experience of poor, minority children (Lunenburg, 2011). The process implemented a School Development Program (SDP) that focused on creating a school environment where students feel comfortable, valued, and secure (Coulter, 1993). This process supported the development of the whole child, which he found led to academic success (Coulter, 1993; Lunenburg, 2011). Comer yielded results in two schools in Connecticut with achievement rates exceeding the national average (Osborne, n.d.) and by the 1980s social and emotional learning gained momentum. A large grant funded in the 1980s, the W.T. Grant Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence, produced a framework for social and emotional learning in schools (Beaty, 2018). By 1994, The Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning was formed to promote positive development for children (CASEL, 2020b), the term SEL was coined, and CASEL became known as The Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (Beaty, 2018).

CASEL focuses on research initiatives that support the social and emotional learning movement in schools, districts, and across the nation (CASEL, 2020c). In addition to CASEL, there are several nationally recognized organizations that are part of the current social and emotional learning movement. These organizations are The National Commission of Social,

Emotional, and Academic Development, as well as the Aspen Institute (Ryerse, 2016), as well as Aperture Education. Aspen Institute researches critical issues across multiple disciplines, including education (*Aspen Institute*, 2020). Aperture Education is a non-profit organization with a mission to support the social and emotional development of children and adults by creating strategies backed by research (Aperture Education, 2019).

In the 2019 report, *Ready to Learn* (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019), the recommendations for a systematic adoption of social and emotional learning in schools nation-wide were as follows: create and articulate a clear vision for students' comprehensive development, including SEL; promote the development of adult capacity and strengthen SEL training among teachers and administrators; foster and support continuous improvement of learning environments; support state SEL learning standards and competency benchmarks backed by funding and resources for full implementation.

What is Social and Emotional Learning?

The concept of social and emotional learning (SEL) is about understanding emotions and how to regulate emotions in order to develop positive relationships that guide ethical behavior (Zins et al., 2007b). The term social and emotional learning refers to a set of skills that one needs to be successful in life (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). These non-cognitive skills have a positive impact in the school environment (Wrabel et al., 2018) and establish a foundation for long-term positive outcomes in the workplace, in relationships, and in society (Frey et al., 2019).

The rationale behind social and emotional learning is that success in life not only requires mastery of academics, but also having the ability to be culturally literate, intellectually reflective, socially skilled, and acquire a healthy disposition (Domitrovich et al., 2017b). While this can encompass a wide range of skills, including 21st century skills, character education, and trauma

informed practice (Jones et al., 2017), CASEL has identified one of the most widely accepted frameworks. The CASEL framework establishes skills across five domains that can be implemented from preschool into high school (Domitrovich et al., 2017b). These domains are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2020a). Self-awareness is the ability to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across context. Self-management is the ability to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations. Social awareness outlines the ability to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts. Relationship skills refers to the ability to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups. Responsible decision making is the ability to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations. These five competencies are interrelated (CASEL, 2020a) and are designed to be applicable across multiple domains and contexts (Mahoney et al., 2020).

Systemic Social and Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning should be a coordinated approach between classroom, school, and community (Domitrovich et al., 2017b). The school is the primary environment where explicit social and emotional learning skills are taught in developmentally appropriate environments. Allowing children to practice these skills requires priority of policy at the school level to create relationship centered learning environments (Mahoney et al., 2020) and structures that support these safe and positive school climates (Domitrovich et al., 2017a). Schools can support the classroom efforts by implementing fair and equitable discipline policies, like positive

behavior interventions systems (PBIS) as well as multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), that provide opportunities for supplemental support with intervention practice for those children that may require that level of support (Domitrovich et al., 2017b). School-wide policies should align with district initiatives for successful integration of social and emotional learning skills. In doing this, schools are able to ensure that established school practices are encouraged and equitably supported within the district (Mahoney et al., 2020).

When school and district efforts align, the impact can be intensified with the integration of family and community partnerships (Domitrovich et al., 2017a). Community partnerships often take the form of mentoring programs or after-school programs. These environments can provide support for students who have deficits with social and emotional learning skills, but more often provide contexts for students to apply the social and emotional skills taught explicitly in the classroom (Zins, 2007b).

The most critical school partnership when supporting the development of social and emotional learning is the family network. Partnership between school and family is critical to success as the family is the other dominant context in a child's life (Mahoney et al., 2020). There are abundant programs and approaches to this, however, five research-based characteristics emerged that define a successful partnership between school and family (Domitrovich et al., 2017b): shared responsibility for the child's development, a commitment to jointly engage in the endeavor, collaborative interactions, school and home are involved in implementing interventions, and a multi-directional flow of communication. Integrating multiple contexts and engaging in partnerships with various stakeholders is critical for implementation of a systemic social and emotional learning framework. A systemic approach to social and emotional learning

is so important that Mahoney et al. (2020) created a public significance statement about the importance of this alignment:

A systemic approach to social and emotional learning (SEL) creates equitable learning conditions that actively involve all Pre-K to Grade 12 students in developing social, emotional, and academic competencies. Decades of research shows these competencies lead to beneficial outcomes at school and in life. Creating these conditions requires aligned policies, resources, and actions at state and district levels to support a coordinated learning process through school-family-community partnerships to enhance student development (p. 2).

Students learn best in collaborative environments. Social and emotional learning practices are most effective when they are intentionally constructed on research-based principals that provide opportunities for application of skills in multiple contexts that are familiar and feel safe for the child (Zins et al., 2007a).

Best Practices in Social and Emotional Learning

There are several essential elements to effective systemic implementation of a social and emotional learning program. A well-implemented program is research-based and incorporates four key elements. The elements that set a foundation for successful acquisition are: sequenced, active, focused, and targeted, and build the acronym S.A.F.E. (Domitrovich et al., 2017a). Sequenced indicates activities that are connected and coordinated to foster skill development. Active refers to active forms of learning to help students master new skills and attitudes. Focused indicates focused time that emphasizes developing personal and social skills. Targeted defines the focus on explicit social and emotional learning skills.

Social and emotional learning is about successfully connecting with others. The social and emotional learning movement has been gaining momentum for over 50 years. Now a nationally recognized framework, social and emotional learning has a presence in schools across the country and has documented success in improving many aspects in life.

Benefits of Social and Emotional Learning

There are many well-documented benefits of social and emotional learning skills. Durlak and Mahoney (2019) published the results of meta-analysis that identified several value-added benefits of the implementation of a social and emotional learning program. These include an increase in academic performance and improved social behaviors. The implementation of social and emotional learning competencies are linked to academic success (Jones & Bouffard, 2012) as interventions can improve academic achievement levels up to 11 percentage points (CASEL, 2020a; Durlak & Mahoney, 2019; Durlak et al., 2011). With social and emotional competence, graduation levels increase, and students have a greater chance of attending college (Hawkins et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2017; Wrabel et al., 2018).

Social and emotional learning can strengthen skill sets that create positive life outcomes. Research indicates that in addition to influence on academics, social and emotional learning promotes healthier life choices and improved health outcomes (Domitrovich et al., 2017a). Social and emotional learning can increase levels of engagement (Yang et al., 2018), sense of belonging (Jagers et al., 2019), and school connectedness (Bower et al., 2015).

Engagement

Engagement is defined as taking part in something, or to occupy someone's attention. Student engagement, defined for the purpose of this study, referred to how involved or interested students appear to be in school or with a specific topic (Axelson & Flick, 2010). Student

engagement can be studied in the educational environment, social surroundings, or within the community (Martin & Torres, 2016). Levels of engagement can vary in differing contexts and effect is measured across cognitive, emotional, and behavioral domains.

Student engagement impacts academic achievement (Reyes et al., 2012). High levels of student engagement foster positive outcomes in school including enhanced performance on standardized tests and increased graduation rates (Martin & Torres, 2016). One way to foster high levels of student engagement is through increasing levels of self-efficacy (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013). Self-efficacy is the belief that a person holds in their own abilities (Wilde & Hsu, 2019) and it shapes individual behaviors and perspectives.

One approach to building self-efficacy is through the development of social and emotional learning skills. CASEL (2020c) cites self-awareness, one of the five core competencies, as experiencing self-efficacy. Providing direct instruction surrounding this competency could enhance the individual perception of self-efficacy and consequently, in doing this, sustain practices within the educational environment that build self-efficacy to support engagement.

Sense of Belonging

Belonging is the need to be accepted in a group. Within an educational context, sense of belonging defines the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported in the school social environment (Goodenow & Grady, 1993 as cited in Ma, 2003). The feeling of belonging is impactful on life outcomes. A heightened state of belonging can have a positive impact on motivation and engagement, while lacking a sense of belonging can create detrimental social outcomes (Ma, 2003). Examples of negative outcomes include increased likelihood of dropping out of high school (Ma, 2003), increased likelihood of engaging in risky

behaviors (Pendergast et al., 2018), and increased probability of joining a gang (Sonterblum, 2020). Sense of belonging is a strong predictor of mental health resilience and adjustment abilities in adolescents (Oldenfield, 2018).

Maslow (1943) identified sense of belonging as a basic human need. He postulates that if there is a lack of love and esteem, an individual will look for resources to fill that need. Building on Maslow's (1963) work that a sense of belonging must be fulfilled prior to moving on to sustained growth needs, it was determined that unless students identify well with their schools, their education connectedness would be hindered (Finn, 1989). Research indicates that schools that foster high levels of student engagement are often described as caring and supportive, and conversely, unsupportive environments undermine motivation and achievement (Juvonen, 2006).

Vulnerable, at-risk students can benefit from implementing practices that support a sense of belonging. Resnick et al. (1993) stated that interventions for youth at-risk must critically examine the ways in which opportunities for a sense of belonging may be fostered, particularly among youth who do not report any significant caring relationships in their lives with adults (p. S3). Creating intervention supports that foster positive relationships can be one way to address this need for this specific population.

School environments can have a significant impact on promoting sense of belonging. One way to do that is through social and emotional learning. Social and emotional learning structures can foster a sense of belonging by creating an environment of emotional safety and community (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018). When social and emotional learning skills create supportive classroom environments, deficiency needs begin to diminish, and movement toward self-actualization occurs. In this study, the one critical practice linked to the implementation of the

social and emotional learning framework was the building of small, inclusive mentoring groups with caring adults that can create warm and inclusive environments.

Connectedness

Connectedness is the experience of belonging. School connectedness refers to the perception a student has regarding the level of belonging they feel within the school (Osher et al., 2009). Student connectedness is important in the educational environment for several reasons. Studies have shown that when students feel validation and connectedness, there is a positive impact on student engagement (Lemberger & Clemens, 2012) and the probability that students will engage in high-risk behavior declines (Furlong et al., 2011).

Connectedness is an experience and experience impacts perception. Perception will differ from person to person, and therefore what fosters connectedness will vary likewise. However, there are several factors that can promote positive attachment and connectedness to school regardless of perception. These include a heightened sense of belonging and the belief that teachers care (Blum, 2005). Therefore, schools can create a climate of connectedness by creating opportunities within the school day for students to engage with each other and with adults in caring conversations. In a traditional learning environment this can be accomplished through the implementation of social and emotional learning initiatives, Positive Behavior Interventions and Support systems (PBIS-OSEP, 2019), and mentoring models (Karcher et al., 2002).

For students isolated in remote environments as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, fostering connectedness became simultaneously a greater priority and a greater challenge. With vulnerable students isolated in potentially unhealthy environments, the need multiplied. This study aimed to improve connectedness for vulnerable, at-risk students isolated in remote learning environments with a social and emotional learning framework to attempt to mitigate isolation

and improve connectedness and engagement. The presentation of the framework through a mentoring model intended to enhance the perception of belonging by creating a cohort of students who engage in pro-social behaviors with a caring adult.

Vulnerable, At-Risk Youth

The term at-risk is best understood as a concept, rather than a definition with finite parameters. The term can describe academic, behavioral, or emotional factors (Moore, 2006) and can characterize students as having any type of limitations making them unprepared to succeed academically or in life (Bulger & Watson, 2006). The term vulnerable applies to any student who lacks material elements (food, clothing, and shelter), emotional elements (care, love, and support) or social elements (friends and positive role models) and present with any combination of these deficiencies (Skinner et al., 2006).

There are several generalized characteristics that define the phrase vulnerable, at-risk students. Low socio-economic status is one predictor of at-risk identification (Christle et al., 2005). The term low socio-economic status is relational to the environment in which a student lives. Poverty in the United States is defined by examining combined household income in relation to the number of individuals living in a household and the age of persons in the house. In 2019, there were 34 million people in the United States living in poverty. Poverty rates are much higher for minorities. The poverty rate for African American citizens is 18.8 % and Hispanic 15.7%, compared to 9.1% for White citizens (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). If poverty in the home and in the educational environment have significant impacts on cognitive and verbal ability as well as on overall student achievement levels (Brooks-Gunn & Dunn, 1997; Yoshikawa et al., 2012), then minorities are at much greater risk of delays in the educational environment.

Other factors that are generally indicative of vulnerable, at-risk identification are parents with low levels of education (Robertson et al., 2016) and negative patterns of behaviors. These negative behaviors include poor attendance, negative attitude, or poor behavior in the classroom (Sagor & Cox, 2004). Poor classroom behavior can lead to higher levels of discipline incidents and consequences. Students with elevated numbers of suspension are at higher risk to drop out of high school (McDaniel & Yarborough, 2016). Low academic achievement and a disability are also characteristics of vulnerable, at-risk youth.

For the purpose of this study, identifying youth as vulnerable or those who display at-risk characteristics identified a student that may present with any combination of challenges from the home environment that could impact educational and life outcomes. Students identified as at-risk can be in danger for poor health outcomes, poor academic outcomes, increased chances of living in poverty, or increased chances of having mental health issues (McDaniel & Yarborough, 2016).

There are several types of social and emotional learning interventions that are successful at mitigating the deficiencies that vulnerable, at-risk youth present, including school-wide Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (Sugai & Horner, 2009), mentoring (Robertson et al., 2016), and trauma-informed practices (Craig & Stevens, 2016). This study aimed to implement a social and emotional learning framework infused within a mentoring model to mitigate the deficiencies that this population of students may present.

Childhood Trauma

According to Craig (1992), teachers lack an understanding of how learning and behavior are impacted by exposure to trauma, by living in impoverished households, or by any adverse experience during childhood. Adverse experiences during childhood can negatively impact one's academic, social, emotional, and physical health and well-being (Petruccelli et al., 2019). The

ability to deal with student trauma in an academic setting is the missing component in many suburban elementary schools, where trauma is not widely recognized, discussed, or anticipated (Babore et al., 2020).

Trauma is an acute or chronic life event that threatens one's physical or emotional well-being (Perfect et al., 2016). As defined by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2003), reactions to stress are referred to as traumatic stress symptoms. Traumatic reactions can also happen as a result of ongoing stress, including living in unsafe neighborhoods, unstable parenting, or an on-going medical condition (Perfect et al., 2016).

To understand the physical and psychological impacts of trauma, it is essential to frame understanding of typical brain development. Brain development starts in the womb and development continues into early adulthood. While genetics certainly determine many aspects of development (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015), there are several environmental factors that impact brain development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018). Brain development is also influenced by both the environment and interpersonal relationships (Cantor et al., 2017; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015). The quality of these relationships and social interactions impact overall brain health (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018).

When studying brain development, several key findings emerge that link brain development with many executive functions, self-regulation skills, and social-emotional competencies. Brain development is a dynamic progression, influenced by internal (genetic) factors and external (contextual) factors with human relationship as the vessel that internal and external factors mutually reinforce each other. A complex system of processes converge to produce individual development and performance that is impacted by experiences which support

the development of resiliency. Understanding these implications can help better support the development of the whole child (Cantor et al., 2017; Craig & Stevens, 2016).

While research supports that moderate stress in a child's life is not problematic and can build resiliency, prolonged stressful and unsupportive environments can be problematic and can result in negative outcomes on growth and development (Cantor et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2018; Shore, 1997). These experiences can over-stimulate the brain's fear response and trigger an overproduction of cortisol. The chemical cortisol moves the brain into "hyper-arousal," which can result in behaviors that include hyperactivity, anxiety, impulsivity, and sleep problems and can limit a child's ability to use higher-order thinking (Child Information Gateway, 2015; Craig & Stevens, 2016).

When the brain is affected by trauma, the psychological and physiological effects as a result of that trauma can manifest in a variety of ways (Perfect et al., 2016; Phifer & Hull, 2016). At an early age, many processes and functions can be impacted. Within the academic setting, stress can heavily impair cognitive and academic functioning, and/or social/emotional/behavioral functioning (see Figure 8). Students who have experienced trauma often have aggressive, disruptive, or avoidance behaviors, which most often result in higher discipline referrals and subsequently more frequent absences and higher amounts of lost instructional time (Brunzell et al., 2016; Craig & Stevens, 2016; Perfect et al., 2016). Trauma can also hinder learning by interfering with the ability to organize information, the ability to attend to tasks in the classroom, and can undermine the acquisition of language skills (Cole et al., 2019). These outcomes often result in lower standardized test scores and increased probability of referral into a special education program (Brunzell et al., 2016).

Social and emotional learning can begin to mitigate many of the negative impacts from childhood trauma. Developmental patterns emerge in the first years of life and adverse childhood experiences have been proven to negatively impact adulthood (Porche et al., 2016). Behaviors in early childhood can be predictors of future psychiatric disorders and a single common risk factor can initiate several maladaptive developmental pathways; even partial PTSD can create significant problems (Gonzalez et al., 2015). While a person's exposure to life events can have detrimental effects, effective interventions that mold self-regulation and executive function skills can change the trajectory of future responses (Cantor et al., 2017). Furthermore, research indicates that in order to change brain functioning and create new brain synapse patterns, interventions should address the "totality of life" with frequent "replacement experiences" (Shore, 1997), focusing on the whole child and the interdependence of social, emotional, and academic development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018).

Addressing Equity

Building equitable educational environments includes integrating social and emotional learning strategies into other areas, including discipline. Social and emotional learning can be integrated into discipline processes by creating Positive Behavior Intervention Systems (PBIS) throughout the school. A positive behavior intervention system is a school-wide framework for managing all avenues of student conduct and expectation (*Getting Started*, 2019). This type of system is beneficial in several ways, including improving social and emotional competence and decreasing undesirable behavior (Lee & Gage, 2020). Both PBIS and social and emotional learning strategies are described as proactive, inclusionary approaches that work to support student success (Biro, 2018).

Even with many documented benefits of social and emotional learning, initiatives are often fragmented efforts that lack cohesive outcomes (Frey et al., 2019; Zins et al., 2007b). They are compartmentalized, separate parts of the day (Frey et al., 2019). Instead, establishing a systemic social and emotional learning curriculum across multiple contexts and incorporates ongoing professional development is more effective (Yoder et al., 2020). Schoolwide social and emotional learning engages the entire community in creating caring, motivating, and equitable learning environments that promote social, emotional, and academic growth that is paired with high-quality professional learning and the use of data for continuous improvement (CASEL, 2020c). A social and emotional learning program that is high quality creates positive student outcomes with evidence-based results that encompass improvements in behavior and student achievement (Durlak et al., 2011).

Social and emotional learning creates more equitable and inclusive learning environments as the framework supports the development of practices that build the capacity of marginalized voices (CASEL, 2020c). The implementation of social and emotional practices foster anti-biased educational environments by providing support in the areas of identity and agency, public spirit, emotional regulation, cognitive regulation, and/or social skills (Frey et al., 2019; Simmons et al., 2018). Creating an anti-biased educational environment that includes safety from stereotypes, harassment, judgement, and exclusion can be built with integration of social and emotional learning concepts (Scharf, 2018).

PBIS

Positive Behavior Interventions Support (PBIS) systems are school-wide intervention approaches to behavior with the goal of reducing disruptive behavior and creating a positive school environment (Bradshaw et al., 2008). There are several improved student outcomes that

result from the implementation of a PBIS structure (*Getting Started*, 2019). These include increased academic performance (Horner et al., 2009) and increased social and emotional learning competencies (Bradshaw et al., 2010).

A PBIS structure can improve equity in educational environments. The implementation of a multi-tiered approach that is a unified approach for all students promotes a culturally responsive environment as it establishes clear discipline decisions with inclusive practices (McIntosh et al., 2018). A PBIS structure can also be used to create engaging instruction which supports struggling students (Chaparro et al., 2015).

The implementation of a PBIS structure can also increase engagement with students and families. A PBIS framework can be structured to increase family engagement in multiple ways. These include a vision for parent involvement, to include teaching families the PBIS framework to use at home and create open lines of communication between school and home to strengthen partnerships that support students (Garbacz, 2018).

PBIS structures can also assist schools as they return to school buildings after the closure in response to the pandemic. The Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports suggests several critical practices for virtual and face-to-face learning environments. These include connect, screen, support, teach, and monitor. To create connections, student greetings and regular check-ins with families are critical. Screening students for both academic and environmental concerns is important to maintain a positive learning environment regardless of physical location. Support includes establishing healthy learning environments with routines, schedules, and positive expectations. The Center on PBIS (2020) suggests teaching integrate social and emotional learning with academics as well as scaffolded learning experiences. Finally,

monitoring of data for engagement and proficiency is essential to inform next steps for intervention.

PBIS structures can support students in a variety of ways. A PBIS system aligns with social and emotional learning practices in the services of vulnerable, at-risk youth. Most recently, PBIS has proven to assist in the post-traumatic stages of schools reopening after COVID-19 necessitated closures (CPBIS, 2020).

Mentoring

Mentoring is the relationship between two people with one person having more experience and one with less, and the relationship focuses on supporting needs (Mertz, 2004). The person that is providing guidance is the mentor. The person receiving guidance is the protégé. This type of relationship can be formal or informal and can take place in a personal or professional realm. A mentor in a professional setting supports career functions while personal mentors serve psychosocial functions, like friendships and acceptance (Haggard et al., 2010).

Youth mentoring programs provide support for vulnerable youth who display at-risk characteristics by connecting these individuals with adults who can advocate for their needs. The goal of most youth mentoring programs is to support positive life outcomes for those students who are perceived as at-risk in the areas of academics, risk-behaviors, and health (DuBois et al., 2011). Many of the defining characteristics of this population of youth include unstable home factors, so therefore the presence of a mentor can level this challenge by modeling a healthy and stable relationship (Keating et al., 2002) as well as help the youth combat negative life experiences or poor self- image (DuBois et al., 2011).

School-based mentoring programs are a type of site-based mentoring where the mentor-protégé interactions take place at a particular location, and in most instances, at the school site.

The focus of school-based mentoring program is to improve academic outcomes and target students with identified school challenges (Karcher et al., 2006). School-based mentoring programs can be used as an intervention strategy in education (DuBois et al., 2011) and can be structured in a variety of ways (Karcher et al., 2006).

Cross-age peer mentoring is one effective structure. This type of approach involves an older youth as a mentor with a focus on relationships and connectedness to school, rather than academic goals. Two other types of successful school-based mentoring structures are group mentoring and E-mentoring. Group mentoring has unique advantages that one-to-one peer mentoring does not. In group mentoring situations, authentic opportunities can occur to develop pro-social skills and receive peer feedback in a structured environment. In addition, group mentoring can be culturally supportive for minorities (Dubois et al., 2014b) and can serve as a catalyst for positive life outcomes (DuBois et al., 2011). E-mentoring allows for interaction via technology and gained momentum in response to the lack of available mentors willing to engage with youth in face-to-face environments (Dubois et al., 2011).

Trauma Sensitive Schools

One type of trauma informed practice is trauma sensitive schools. Trauma sensitive schools help educators understand the neuro-biological effects of trauma on children and how these effects can negatively impact development, personality, and academic success. A trauma sensitive school creates a safe and caring environment that nurtures all students, including vulnerable youth (Craig & Stevens, 2016).

This approach prioritizes skill development, fosters home and school connections, and can impact climate and instruction. Trauma-informed settings address behaviors in a consistent and supportive manner and focus on social and emotional skills that support the ability to

regulate emotion, as not all children have the ability to adjust to changing external demands (Craig & Stevens, 2016).

Understanding how children learn in contextual situations, built on the principle that brain development is malleable, establishes a foundation for developing an appropriate social and emotional curriculum that is characterized as trauma-sensitive (Cantor et al., 2017).

Supportive environments enable learning. Darling-Hammond et al. (2018) state that supportive learning environments encompass four main features: they place the learner's emotional and social experience at the forefront, they support age-appropriate exploration and discovery, they support flexible and efficient thinking, and they help students acquire habits of mind and character. Priorities of schools should be to create safe learning environments, identify students who need support, provide interventions, and avoid re-traumatization (Phifer & Hull, 2016).

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2020) leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation. This agency defines a trauma-informed approach to realize the impact of trauma, recognizes the symptoms of trauma, and responds by integrating knowledge of trauma informed policies and practices that focus on six key concepts: safety, trust, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural/gender issues (Phifer & Hull, 2016). Cantor et al. (2017) made the following recommendations regarding brain development and educational policy implications:

Specifically, in schools, when consideration is given to the key drivers of positive developmental and learning outcomes—including attuned relational supports; buffering of stress; intentional, sequenced development of integrated habits, skills, and mindsets; rigorous, mastery-oriented pedagogy; and culturally responsive instructional and

curricular design—the developmental range, performance, success, and, ultimately, potential of *all* children can be optimized (p. 327).

Trauma sensitive schools are built upon the foundation of safety, empowerment, and collaboration between students and adults and build on the principles of social and emotional learning and positive behavior intervention frameworks (Craig & Stevens, 2016). Trauma sensitive schools provide social and emotional support rather than traditional discipline approaches that isolate and can be potentially re-traumatizing (Phifer & Hull, 2016).

School-Based Approaches

For any intervention to succeed, teachers must make the connection between impairment from trauma and the ability of a student to succeed academically (Baweja et al., 2015; Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). Teacher efficacy is typically low regarding knowing how to identify traumatized students, trauma reactions, and the most effective approaches to use in the classroom (Craig, 1992).

One approach to building a blueprint for school-based service delivery of trauma services is to implement an external system that builds on the Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) structure. The advantage of this approach of focusing on building a safe environment is that it builds capacity and can be implemented school wide (Chafouleas et al., 2015). Implementation of scientifically based interventions and supports for academics as well as behavior shifts the momentum from the “referral to EC placement pipeline” toward a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). This approach aligns all school initiatives, supports, and resources to integrate and promote academic, behavioral, and social-emotional goals and has six core-defining features: (a) the use of evidence-based practice when providing support to students, (b) tiered organization of supports with increasing intensity, (c) use of a data-based

problem-solving framework for support decisions, (d) decision rules for evaluating student response to support and subsequent modifications, (e) measuring and maintaining treatment fidelity, and (f) identifying students who need support early (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

Administration can support by creating time for in-service and professional development as well as building support from external stakeholders (Baweja et al., 2015). Professional development is the “gateway” to successful delivery of trauma-informed practice in the academic setting (Perfect et al., 2016) and should focus on the following key areas: basics of trauma-including currency and neurobiological impact, de-escalation strategies, and staff self-care (Chafouleas et al., 2015). Professional development trainings should be paired with teacher coaching from school based mental health professionals and other collaborative partnerships. This relationship is the foundation of a Care Coordination Team that identifies students in need of support and collaborates to create a plan of care to address those specific needs (Baweja et al., 2015; Phifer & Hull, 2016).

Adverse childhood experiences due to trauma from abuse or neglect have significant and potentially devastating effects on effective classroom learning and connections to future education or vocational pathways (Brunzell et al., 2016). As noted in the forward of the book *Trauma Sensitive Schools*, Craig and Stevens (2016) state,

Until schools acknowledge the seriousness of this problem and commit to resolving it, the failure of other educational reform initiatives will continue. Trauma is not just a mental health problem. It is an education problem, that left unaddressed, derails the academic achievement of thousands of children (p. viii).

Chronholm et al. (2015) emphasizes the importance of recognizing childhood adversity as a leading indicator of health as well as academic success, and the necessity of embracing a trauma-informed care model.

There are noted gaps in the research on identifying the most effective school-based approach to trauma-informed care for elementary-aged students. This is due in part to the difficulty in the identification of trauma and its prevalence within a setting. Research supports that scientifically based interventions that are focused on safety, empowerment, and collaboration, along with increased teacher participation in school mental health programs that meet the specific social and emotional needs of the student population, can raise morale and improve classroom climate (Chafouleas et al., 2015).

Professional Development

Professional Development is defined as varied learning opportunities and can be characterized to include teachers' learning, how they learn, and how they apply their newly acquired knowledge in practice (Avalos, 2011). Professional development is important for several reasons. If executed properly, it can successfully support teachers with content development and pedagogical knowledge, it can enhance teaching theory (Mak, 2019), as well as improve educational practices (Borko et al., 2010). Effective professional development is linked to raising student achievement levels (Lai & McNaughton, 2016) and has been an ongoing effort in educational reform.

For the last 20 years, high quality professional development has been a federal mandate, cited in the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) as a required opportunity for educators. The report outlined criteria for high quality professional development to include sustainability, as well as intensive, and content focused. It should be aligned with content and student achievement

standards, it must increase teacher knowledge, advance understanding of effective instructional strategies, and be evaluated on a consistent basis for effectiveness.

For many years professional development included a singular approach or process addressing a topic, delivered outside of the school setting in one session of professional development (Borko et al., 2010). The professional development paradigm is shifting toward more of a focus on content, and includes active learning, and collective participation (Desimone, 2011). Effective professional development is now situated in practice focus on student learning (Borko et al., 2010). Established around a collaborative culture, it integrates teacher leadership and expertise (Yaron, 2017), should be integrated with other aspects of school change (Borko et al., 2010), and includes follow-up and feedback. Effective professional development should have a long-term focus that supports teachers as they work in collaborative groups within their own environment (Borko et al., 2010). Professional development is now an integrated aspect of professional learning communities. It is in the professional learning communities that teachers can collaborate in the planning and follow-up discussions. It is this sustainability that can shift school culture.

Integrating technology into professional development can also improve the effectiveness of the professional development. Technology can integrate support from extended areas and can be a cost-effective way to bring varying perspectives into professional learning communities. Technology can also be used to accommodate busy schedules and bring together participants from multiple environments (Borko et al., 2010). This was especially applicable in this study with the continually changing situations and environments in response to the coronavirus, or COVID-19, pandemic. The professional development was delivered to the staff participants

through an online platform to ensure safety, but also to ensure that all staff are could be able to participate despite location or barriers.

Summary and Conclusions

The promotion of social, emotional, and academic learning is not a shifting educational fad; it is the substance of education itself (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018). The social and emotional learning movement has been present for over 50 years. Growing bodies of research support a systemic implementation of social and emotional learning competencies. Researchers cite a plethora of positive outcomes and benefits from implementation of social and emotional learning skills including increased levels of student engagement (Domitrovich et al., 2017a; Durlak & Mahoney, 2019; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Research indicates that social and emotional learning can disrupt the negative outcomes of stressful and unstable home environments and can even counteract some of the impacts of childhood trauma (Porche et al., 2016). Social and emotional learning skills, when designed as a framework for intervention that align with Positive Behavior Intervention Support systems, can promote equity within the academic environment.

This study, designed to implement a social and emotional learning framework through a mentoring lens, focused on addressing the inequity that vulnerable at-risk youth face. In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, and the potentially traumatizing effects of these events, this study aimed to mitigate deficiencies presented by vulnerable, at-risk youth and support the growth of the whole child with the implementation of social and emotional learning practices. The effectiveness of implementation was measured by tracking levels of engagement and connectedness.

Chapter 3 outlines the methods of inquiry in the study through a mixed methods action research approach. This chapter will examine the guiding questions of the focus of practice and detail the inquiry methods, study design, and the rationale of the study. The inquiry process, including the pilot study and instrumentation, are detailed in Chapter 3. Also covered in Chapter 3 are the delimitations, limitations, and assumptions that are associated with the study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF INQUIRY

This chapter outlines the blueprint of this focus of practice study, including the guiding questions, and details the inquiry method and rationale. Each step of the study is unpacked in this chapter, detailing inquiry phases and procedures, instrumentation, data collection and analysis methods. The assumptions, delimitations, and limitations are outlined at the end of the chapter as well as how these will be addressed, where possible.

The focus of practice in this study was the implementation of a social and emotional learning, online-mentoring framework to support identified vulnerable isolated youth in a remote learning environment as a result of the coronavirus, or COVID-19, pandemic. The implementation of the social and emotional framework with mentoring supports aimed to increase levels of student engagement and connectedness in a virtual environment during a pandemic.

Focus of Practice Guiding Questions

This study is guided by the following questions:

1. How is student engagement impacted by the implementation of a social and emotional mentoring framework for vulnerable youth isolated in a remote learning environment during a pandemic?
2. How is student connectedness impacted by the implementation of a social and emotional mentoring framework in a remote learning environment during a pandemic?
3. How does strategic professional development support staff in the ability to meet the needs of at-risk, vulnerable students?

In order to gauge the impact of implementation of this framework on levels of engagement and connectedness, this study incorporated three action research phases with specific data gathered at each phase. The first phase was the planning and development phase with baseline data collection, the second phase was implementation of a social and emotional learning framework and data collection from implementation, and the third phase included post-implementation data collection and comprehensive data analysis. Figure 11 outlines the three phases of the study.

Inquiry Design and Rationale

The design of this study was a mixed methods action research. Mixed methods refers to the combination of both qualitative and quantitative data within one study to gain a comprehensive and exhaustive perspective on an issue (Mertler, 2019). The purpose of action research is to have a process that can be used to identify issues, and through inquiry, incite action in order to improve conditions in one's environment (Mertler, 2019). Action research allows the scholarly practitioner to challenge long-held assumptions and provides a shift in practice that will accelerate the evolution of new paradigms (Sagor & Williams, 2017). The action research model in this study will allow me as the scholarly practitioner to implement theories of action in short intervals followed by discourse and analysis of the data.

In this study, qualitative and quantitative data was gathered for analysis of the impact of a social and emotional learning framework on levels of engagement and connectedness for vulnerable youth in a virtual environment during a pandemic. Data was gathered from focus groups with faculty and students, student surveys, student self-assessments, and student demographic profiles completed by the teacher. To create opportunity for analysis that can

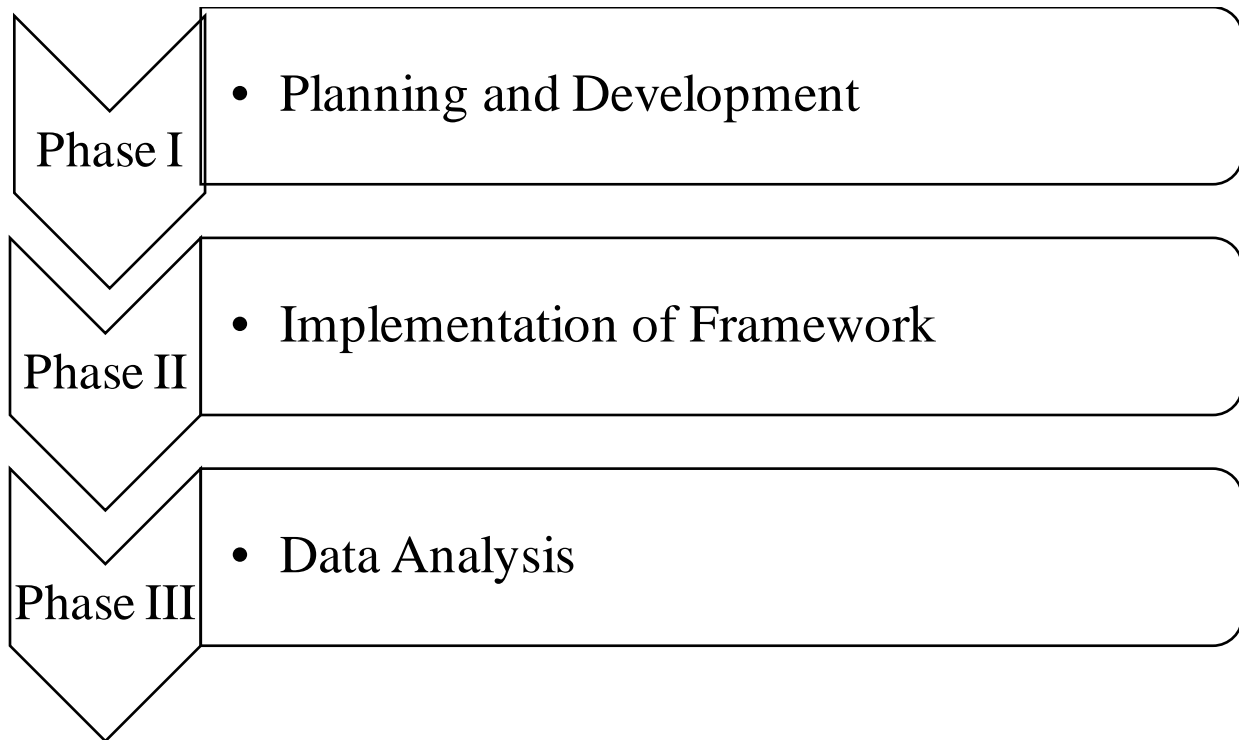


Figure 11. Three phases of the study.

impact shifts in practice and implementation, Phase II of the study was divided into three subphases. After each subphase focus groups with the Core Team occurred with member checks. Member checking is when the researcher gathers participants in a focus group to ensure accuracy of the account (Creswell & Poth, 2018) as well as ensure accurate data interpretation (Mertler, 2019).

Mertler (2019) states that action research solves problems at a more personal level as it focuses on a problem that is specific to one population. This study was designed to measure the effect of a specific theory of action with a population of vulnerable youth that display at-risk characteristics. The qualitative and quantitative data gathered was disaggregated by gender, race, and socio-economic status. Research indicates that children of color, as well as children who come from lower socio-economic households, have low academic achievement levels and higher discipline rates, and these disparities cause inequity as they are a result of bias (Morsy & Rothstein, 2015; Rocque & Snellings, 2018). A critical focus on data surrounding gender, race, and socio-economic status subgroups was an attempt to identify actions that have a positive impact and can be used to mitigate the inequity of access to education.

Valid data collection is essential for any study and there are several practices that enhance the probability of collecting accurate data. One approach is utilizing a variety of instruments and methods to triangulate data during analysis (Mertler, 2019). In this study, data was gathered from several instruments at various stages for analysis. Persistent and prolonged participation at the study site creates familiarity (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertler, 2019) to ensure validity of data. In this study, as the principal at West Elementary School, I have been the administrator for six years and have had the opportunity to become familiar with the site of the

study and the participants. As a result, I have an extensive understanding of the school culture and have developed a rapport with the participants. A final validation strategy used in this study is peer review and debriefing of the data and research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Throughout the span of the study, several colleagues engaged in analytic discourse with me surrounding data collection in attempts to mitigate bias when drawing conclusions. This also occurred at the end of each phase. The role of these collaborative inquiry partners is outlined in the next section.

Collaborative Inquiry Partners

Collaborative inquiry is a highly effective educational strategy. Inquiry teams that study data and use that data to guide instruction produces favorable outcomes as the collective effort and opportunity for discourse improves instructional approach and facilitation (David, 2009). For this study, collaboration occurred between district level and school level administration, between elementary schools within the district, and with various school level teams individuals. Table 7 outlines the role of each collaborative partner in the study.

Several considerations were taken throughout the scope of the study regarding the ethical considerations and approvals needed to conduct this study in a responsible manner. First, I completed an ethics course on Social/Behavioral Research Investigations and Key Personnel from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program. This program trains researchers and scholarly practitioners to follow legal, moral, and ethical protocols involving human research. Second, the study will undergo a thorough examination by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of East Carolina University. This assurance was completed in advance of a study being conducted and periodically throughout the span of the study to ensure that the security and safety of the participants involved in the research was protected.

Table 7

Collaborative Inquiry Partners

Level	Collaborative Partner	Role in Study
District Level	WCPS Director of Social and Emotional Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review plan of implementation for alignment with district goals
	WCPS Executive Director of School Improvement and Accountability	
	School Psychologist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with scholarly practitioner to identify independent variables with the action research cycles
	SEL Interventionist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist scholarly practitioner in analysis of data to inform cycles of inquiry Assist scholarly practitioner with data disaggregation to assist behavioral needs of student(s)
	Professional Development Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflective dialogue on the professional development of SEL Core Team
School Level	West Elementary School Improvement Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administer staff perception surveys
	West Elementary SEL Core Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review baseline data and review data between cycles of implementation Participate in focus groups during phase II and phase III
	West Elementary Counselor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administer Student surveys
	West Elementary Classroom Teachers (virtual classroom teachers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nominate 1-2 students for student sample Complete pre and post SEL profiles on students selected to participate in the survey
	West Elementary Students (selected to participate in the study)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete the student self-assessment Participate in post-implementation focus groups.

There are several approvals required prior to implementation to maintain ethical practices. To ensure participants are protected and there is concern for their welfare (Creswell & Poth, 2018), several considerations were taken. Informed consent was gathered from the adult participants, as well as the parents of the minor participants. Informed consent is permission from anyone over the age of 18, involves disclosure of the purpose of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and agreement from participants to engage in the scope of the project (Mertler, 2019). This study took place at an elementary school and some of the participants in the study are students. Informed assent was also obtained from the students. Informed assent is permission for participation from anyone under the age of 18 (Al-Sheyab et al., 2019). The informed consent form and the informed assent form are located in Appendix C and Appendix D.

Additional approvals included consent at the university level as well as from the Western County Public Schools. At the university level, approval was obtained from both the dissertation chairperson and the committee linked to the dissertation. At the local level, the Superintendent of the Western County Public Schools reviewed the proposal, as well as the plan for communication with stakeholders, and gave approval for the study to take place. At the school level, the framework and the scope and sequence of the study was presented to the West Elementary School Improvement Team, who serve as the teacher leadership team, for approval.

Inquiry Procedures

This study was implemented in three phases. Phase I was characterized as the planning and development phase. This phase included the pilot study as well as the collection of baseline data. Phase II involves implementation of the social and emotional framework that included a mentoring component. This phase is divided into three sub-phases. Phase III is described as the

data-analysis phase and centered around gathering post-implementation qualitative and quantitative data from focus groups and self-assessments.

Phase I- Planning and Development

Pilot Study

A pilot study is designed to evaluate the feasibility of instrumentation with the goal to refine process prior to implementation (Mertler, 2019). In this study, a pilot focus group was constructed with the purpose of inciting discussion about social and emotional learning, gathering information about levels of student welfare, to test protocols, and determine the validity of the instrument that will be used for data collection later in the study. The four questions designed for the pilot focus group were designed to foster relaxed conversation, put participants at ease, and transition smoothly into more reflective discourse. The protocol with questions utilized in this pilot study are listed in Appendix E.

Participants in the pilot study included a teacher from the primary grades (kindergarten-second grade), a teacher from the upper elementary grades (third grade-fifth grade), an enhancement teacher (non-academic), and a classified staff member (instructional assistant, custodian, bus driver). These participants did not take part in any other part of the study. The staff selected to participate in the pilot study were teachers who are instructing students in a classroom with face-to-face learning, rather than virtual learning.

The virtual learning teachers were involved in student selection at a later point in Phase I. Participants were asked to complete demographic questions prior to meeting for discussion. The focus group was facilitated by me virtually so that the discussion and participants' body language could be recorded for coding and analysis. Prior to the implementation of the study, analysis of

the focus group data occurred with discourse with collaborative inquiry partners to better inform future cycles of implementation.

Social and Emotional Learning Core Team

The next step of Phase I was the selection, training, and orientation of a Core Team. This team would be the nucleus of the implementation phase, or Phase II. This team was comprised of school-based staff, including the school counselor. To solicit potential team members for the Core Team, all West Elementary staff members were sent an invitation to attend a preview of the study. Those staff that attended the preview were given an outline of the scope and sequence of the study, as well as the commitment of being a Core Team member. They were also asked to sign an informed consent if willing to participate. The outline of commitment can be found on the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B).

Once informed consent was given, the team received professional development on the depth and breadth of the study, including training on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and facilitation requirements during Phase II. The Core Team was also responsible for creating the student selection criteria used to identify vulnerable youth with at-risk characteristics in the virtual classrooms at West Elementary for potential participation in the study. The Core Team also oversaw the student selection. Reschley et al. (2007) states that a small group of students should be no more than six students per group. This study necessitated that two Core Team members serve together in each family, therefore the number of families would be dependent on the number of adults that elected to participate.

Qualifying Characteristics of Vulnerable, At-Risk Youth

The staff at West Elementary was surveyed to share five academic or behavioral characteristics of youth that may be characterized as vulnerable or at-risk. Responses were

recorded and tallied, and a comprehensive list of the most frequently cited characteristics finalized the list that was embedded in the student nomination form. The survey used to determine characteristics of vulnerable, at-risk youth is located in Appendix G.

Student Selection

The nomination form was sent to every teacher at West Elementary instructing in a virtual classroom as part of the upcoming student selection process. The nomination form is listed in Appendix H. Each teacher was asked to nominate up to two students that fit the criteria listed on the nomination form. At West Elementary there were 13 teachers, who range from Kindergarten to fifth grade, that teach in virtual classrooms; therefore, up to 26 students could participate in the study. Once all recommendations were received and consent forms and assent forms were returned, student grouping began. The Core Team, the social and emotional interventionist, and I sorted the students into student teams, or families.

Each family was a vertical group of students and had participants ranging from kindergarten to grade five. To ensure that bias does not impact student selection, only the grade level and gender of the potential student participants was visible when sorting students into families. Once the families were created, two Core Team members were assigned to each family.

The students were sorted into three families with seven students each. Each family had two SEL Core Team members as team leaders. These team leaders organized and shared a schedule with each student of the dates and times for family meetings. For the purpose of data analysis, each family was labeled with a color name: blue, red, and yellow.

Informed Consent and Assent

I contacted the parent or guardian of each student nominated to participate in the study to inform the parent or guardian of the details surrounding the study and invite their child to

participate. The parent or guardian was emailed and asked to sign and return both the informed consent and the informed assent (completed by their child). Student participation was permissible only with received informed consent from parents and informed assent from the student. In this study I was the lead researcher and the principal. I contacted students in the study as well as their families as part of the daily routine of school. Establishment of familiarity was important to increase the likelihood of obtaining informed consent. After consent was obtained, the Core Team members in each family reached out to the students to invite participants to the first meeting. Due to the fact the students chosen are those that are isolated in a remote learning environment, the students were also given information on the study, including an overview of the activities associated with joining a family, and the span of weeks they could expect to be a member of the family.

Baseline Student Data Collection

Two instruments were used for pre-implementation, baseline data collection. The first was a social and emotional profile with demographic questions. This was completed by the teacher of each participating student. The profile was emailed to the teachers to complete. The social and emotional learning profile is located in Appendix I. The other instrument was a student self-assessment. This tool asked student participants to gauge their own levels of engagement and connectedness. This self-assessment was emailed to the parent to assist the student with completion. If a student was unable to complete the self-assessment, or an extended period went by without receiving a response, the West Elementary School counselor or a Core Team member reached out to the student to check in on progress.

Summary of Phase I

Phase I began with a pilot study to refine the instrument for subsequent phases and included building and training a Core Team. The Core Team assisted with selection of student participants. At the end of Phase I, baseline data was gathered from the social and emotional learning profiles and student self-assessments. A summary of Phase I, along with correlating inquiry instruments data collection methods, and collaborative inquiry partners is outlined in Figure 12.

Phase II-Implementation of Framework

Family Meetings

In this study, the term “family meeting” referred to the six interactions between the vertical team of students and the SEL Core Team members. The purpose of each family meeting was to build mentoring relationships between students and SEL Core Team members while facilitating social and emotional learning skills and competencies. In addition, the family meetings could serve as a means of identifying potential deficiencies or growth needs that should to be fulfilled.

There were six family meetings scheduled in Phase II, two in each subphase. Subphase IIa focused on the competencies of Self-Awareness and Self-Management. The CASEL competencies of Social-Awareness and Relationship Skills are a focus of Subphase IIb. Subphase IIc centered around the competency of Responsible Decision Making. The topics of the first five family meetings aligned with the five CASEL (2020a) competencies. The five lessons used in Phase II were adapted from the Indiana Social and Emotional Learning Competencies for both early elementary and late elementary students. These five lessons are in Appendices K-O. The final meeting involved a culminating activity that was created with

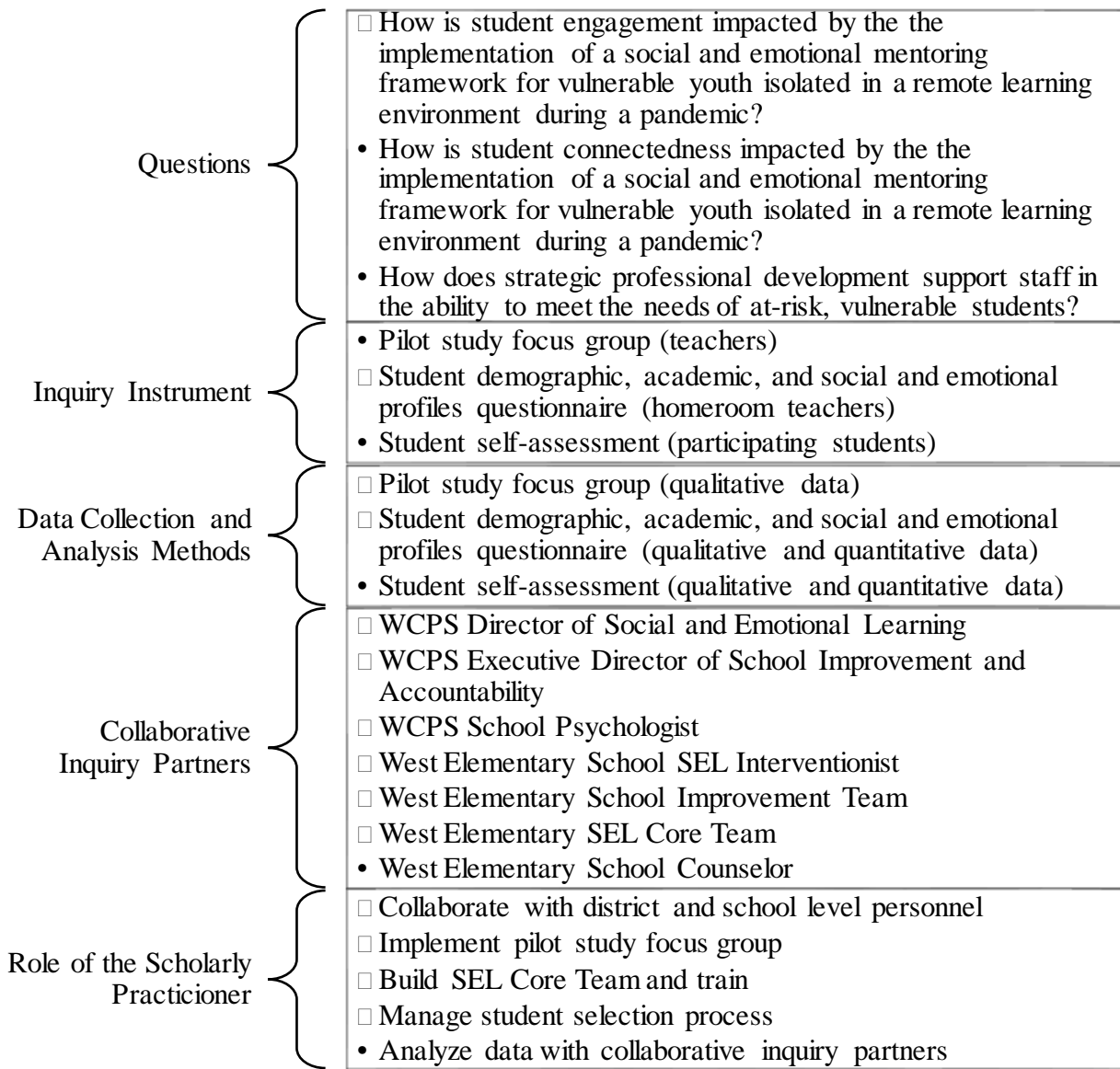


Figure 12. Overview of Phase I.

Core Team and student input. The scope and sequence for these family meetings along with the appropriate CASEL competency and the correlating subphase is outlined in Table 8.

Family meetings were conducted via the online platform, Google Meet, utilized by Western County Public Schools. Students were very familiar with this platform as classroom teachers use it daily. Each meeting lasted approximately 45 minutes and the meeting included structured activities and response time. The goal for each meeting was for all students to share semi-structured responses. During the meeting, the Core Team members were asked to take anecdotal notes on each participant.

The Core Team members conducted the family meetings on a designated day and at a designated time. At West Elementary School, there is a school-wide morning meeting time for teachers to support social and emotional learning skills, so therefore each of the family meetings took place at that time. The day of the family meeting was Wednesday to allow time to hold the Core Team focus group and to administer the student surveys (when scheduled) before the close of the week.

Social and Emotional Learning Core Team Focus Group

Throughout the study, Core Team members participated in a focus group. The purpose of the focus group was to gather data surrounding effectiveness of implementation as well as the effect on levels of connectedness and engagement. These meetings were conducted via an online platform so that audio and visual responses of the participants could be recorded. The recording was useful in transcription of the semi-structured responses for qualitative data analysis.

The final focus group, conducted after Phase IIc, had additional questions focused on reflection of the entire process. The data from these additional questions helped to gauge effectiveness of implementation during data analysis. The responses from the SEL Core Team

Table 8

Phase II Family Meeting Scope and Sequence

Subphase	Meeting	CASEL Competency
IIa	#1	Self-Awareness
	#2	Self-Management
IIb	#3	Social Awareness
	#4	Relationship Skills
IIc	#5	Responsible Decision Making
	#6	Culminating Activity

members were also structured to inform planning for replication of the study if data indicated positive impact on levels of student engagements and connectedness. The protocol for these focus groups is in Appendix Q.

Student Survey

After each family meeting, the students were administered a brief survey. The survey was worded slightly different for students in primary grades (kindergarten, first grade, and second grade) and for upper grades (third grade, fourth grade, and fifth grade) to address the developmental needs of the varying ages of the students. The surveys in the upper grades incorporated more rigorous vocabulary and sentence structure. These two surveys are in Appendix R and Appendix S, respectively. In the informed consent prior to student participation, parents are notified of the surveys and were asked to assist their child as needed. However, if the parent did not assist, a member of the SEL Core Team or the WES School Counselor helped these students with completing the survey, transcribing responses as needed.

The responses from the survey were used to track fluctuations in individual levels of student engagement, as well as track student need. The qualitative and quantitative data collected was analyzed to determine the elements of the framework that made the greatest or the least impact in the study.

Summary of Phase II

Phase II focused on implementation and data collection. Phase II was divided into three smaller parts, or sub phases, to allow for increased opportunity for data collection and reflection in the action research cycles. Phase II implemented a comprehensive social and emotional learning framework that includes facilitation of the five CASEL competencies within an online mentoring framework for students. The online framework was conducted in small groups, or

family meetings, to build relationships with caring adults that can identify deficiency needs, with the hope of finding a way to meet these needs. The development of the whole child, as referenced in the Science of Learning and Development model, was supported by several domains which are addressed in the social and emotional learning framework implemented in this study. A summary of Phase II, along with correlating inquiry instruments, data collection methods, and collaborative inquiry partners is outlined in Figure 13.

Phase III- Data Analysis

Student Focus Groups

Three student focus groups were facilitated in a virtual meeting platform. The focus groups took place within the week of the sixth family meeting to ensure students could recall events of the study and provide detailed responses to the questions. The students were not in their family groups for these focus groups but were divided into grade alike bands. They were divided into three groups: kindergarten and first grade, second and third grade, and fourth and fifth grade. The purpose of these divisions was to differentiate levels of discussion. The same protocol was used for each group. The protocol for this focus group and the list of differentiated questions for each grade level band can be found in Appendix T.

Post-Implementation Data Collection

In Phase I, the teachers of the students who participated in the study were asked to complete a social and emotional learning profile with demographic data questions (see Appendix I). In Phase III, the teachers completed the same social and emotional learning profile post-implementation that was completed pre-implementation. This survey was sent to teachers electronically within a week of the sixth family meeting. Responses from the post

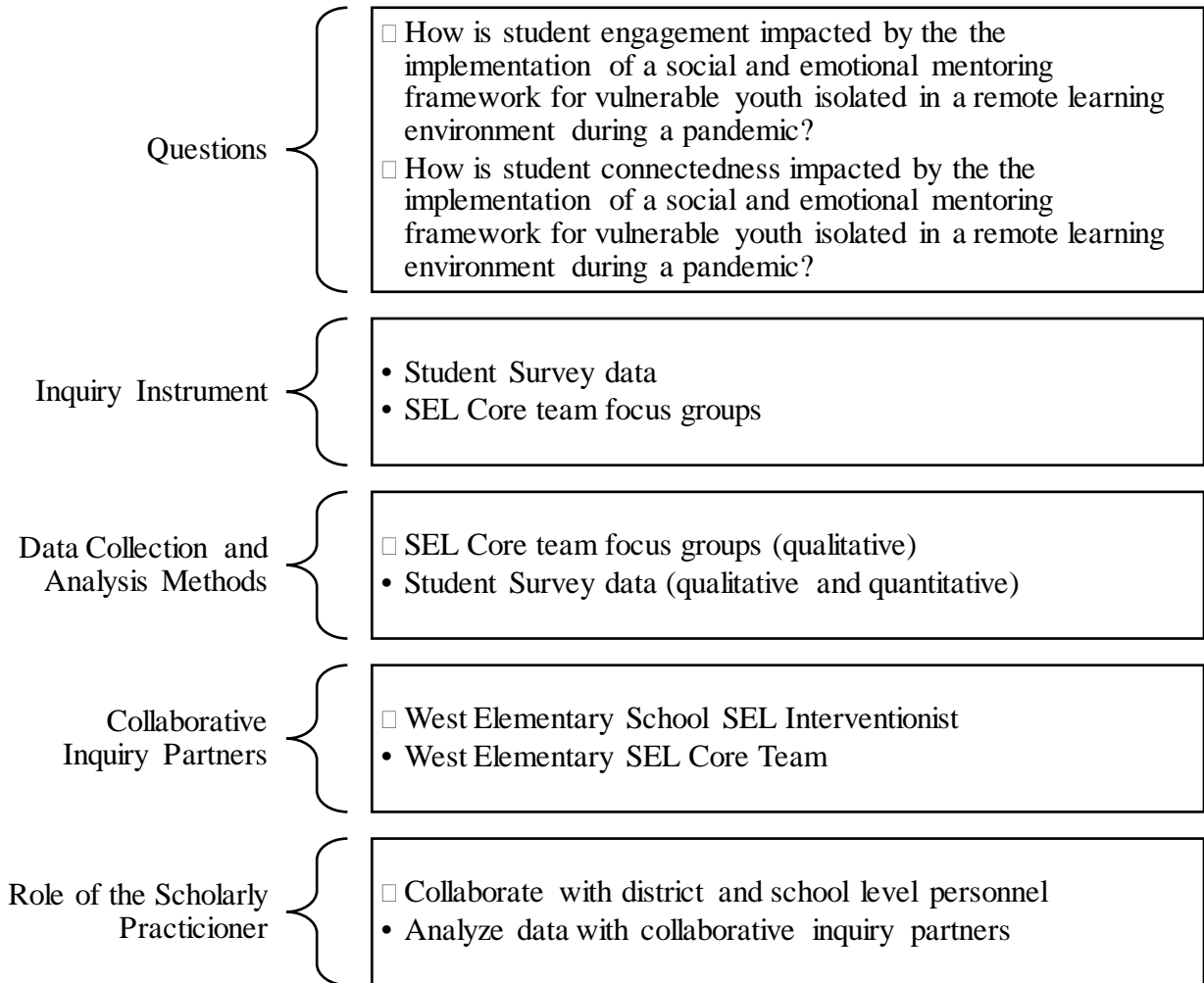


Figure 13. Overview of Phase II.

implementation was used to determine impact of implementation of the framework on levels of student engagement and connectedness.

Similarly, in Phase I students were administered a self-assessment (see Appendix J) and were re-administered the self-assessment post-implementation during Phase III. The students and the parents were emailed the student survey within a week of the student focus group meeting. In the event a student needed assistance with completing the survey, the West Elementary School counselor was able to assist with completing this task.

Once all the data was gathered, the data was analyzed with collaborative inquiry partners. The qualitative data from the focus groups was transcribed to conduct inductive analysis and to interpret the themes that emerge. I also engaged in reflective discourse with Collaborative Inquiry Partners to reflect on effectiveness of implementation of the framework.

Summary of Phase III

Phase III involved collecting data post-implementation. In this phase students participated in a focus group as well as completed a post-implementation student survey that was administered in Phase I. The teachers of these students were also readministered the social and emotional learning profiles from Phase I as well. The purpose of administering the same assessment before and after implementation was to look for increases or decreases in metrics surrounding engagement and connectedness. After all data was gathered the data analysis with collaborative inquiry partners occurred. A summary of Phase III, along with correlating inquiry instruments, data collection methods, and collaborative inquiry partners, is outlined in Figure 14.

Inquiry Design Rigor

This study was a mixed methods action research design. The purpose of a mixed methods study is to bring together both qualitative data and quantitative data to analyze for deeper

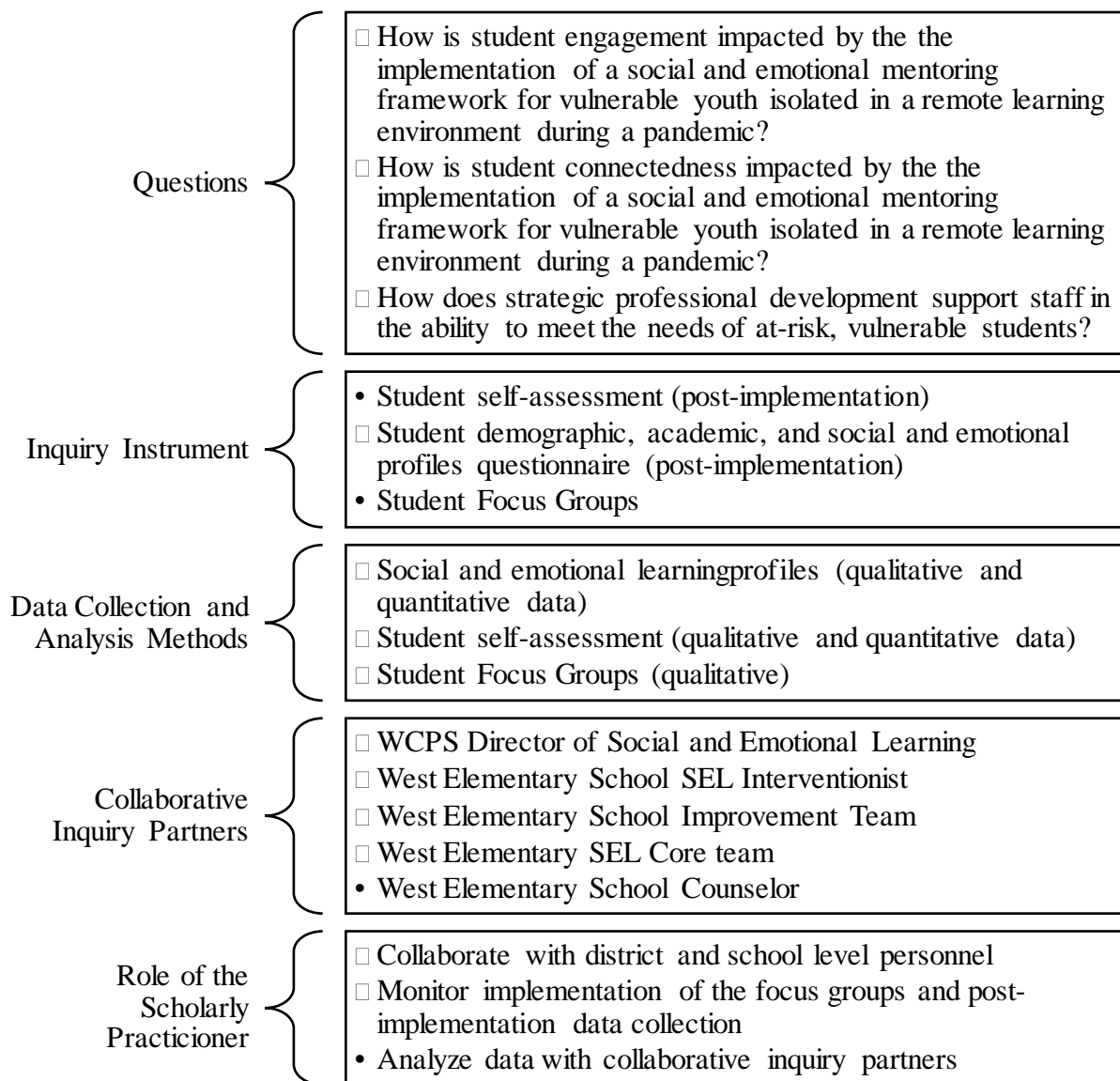


Figure 14. Overview of Phase III.

understanding of a topic (Mertler, 2019; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). In this study, both qualitative and quantitative data was gathered to answer the research questions framed in this study.

The purpose of action research is to conduct inquiries in a systematic way in order to gather information at a specific site and with a specific population (Mertler, 2019). This study was conducted at West Elementary School in Western County, North Carolina with a population of students identified as vulnerable and at-risk. Action research involves cycles of inquiry with systematic reflection (Mertler, 2019) and is designed to create a shift in practice (Sagor & Williams, 2017). This study incorporated a pilot study along with several phases of implementation and included reflective discourse with collaborative inquiry partners to adjust implementation if data indicated the need to do so.

Mertler (2019) notes the importance of a pilot study in validating the questions that will be used in the actual study. This study implemented a focus group pilot test of the instrument in Phase I that was used in Phase II and Phase III. The pilot study assisted in identifying potential issues with the questions and format, but also familiarized the scholarly practitioner with the format (Abu Hassan et al., 2006). The questions that were used in the study were adjusted in response to the pilot focus group in attempt to gather data that specifically addresses the questions framed in this study.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

The first assumption identified in this study was that all staff involved in the study understand the concept of social and emotional learning and believe that social and emotional learning is beneficial to students. Therefore, when examining the data collected from this action

research study, it was assumed that all teachers understood and implemented the social and emotional structures with fidelity and that staff engaged in authentic participation with the students as a mentor.

The second assumption was that the students would participate in the entire scope of the study. The theoretical foundations and conceptual frameworks identified in this study establish the need to foster relationships and connections with this population of vulnerable youth in order to effectively mitigate the deficiencies they presented. While all phases of the study, even in fragments, have the potential to make a positive impact, participation in the entire study is essential to determine full impact. In order for the pre and post data collection instruments to align as they were designed, complete participation is required.

Limitations

Being both the lead researcher and the building administrator at West Elementary could potentially impact the validity of responses from the focus groups. The dual role of scholarly practitioner and administrator could impart pressure on staff to participate. This limitation could impact the validity of the responses if a participant feels that an answer could jeopardize employment. To mitigate the vulnerability of the participants, I solicited informed consent, maintained transparency with the study plan, and allowed participants to decline participation at any time.

This study was designed for implementation with a population of students that are described as vulnerable, and who present with at-risk characteristics. One limitation was the potential negative connotation that the term “at-risk” may have. If the families negatively viewed this identifier, this could have impacted willingness to grant consent for student participation in the study.

This study worked with elementary school students. Participation in this study would include parent participation. On the consent form, parents were notified of the survey as a data collection method and were asked to assist students as needed in completing the survey. In helping their child, the parental input could have affected the outcome of the student's answers. This limitation was taken into consideration when studying the data.

Finally, this study was designed for implementation during a pandemic. Due to the unpredictability of a pandemic, there were fluctuations in learning environment, depth of implementation, consistency from participants, frequency in meetings, or availability of resources. In attempts to mitigate the potential of circumstances outside of the locus of control, the family meetings were held in virtual environments with the hope that students will be able to participate regardless of outside circumstances. In addition, more than one member of the SEL Core Team was part of each family in the event sickness impacts any member of the adult participants on the study.

Another limitation in this study is the lack of scholarly research surrounding the educational impact of implementation of academic or social and emotional skills during a pandemic. This study attempted to help fill the gap in research.

Delimitations

This study only engaged with those students that are in a remote learning environment at West Elementary School. This study was designed for implementation during a pandemic. Due to the unpredictability of a pandemic, there can be fluctuations in learning environment, depth of implementation, consistency from participants, frequency in meetings, or availability of resources. Therefore, this study was delimited to West Elementary School and results may not be applicable to other schools.

Role of the Scholarly Practitioner

The role of the scholarly practitioner in this study was to work with the collaborative inquiry partners to develop a systematic investigation for the action research study that was clearly communicated to all stakeholders. This work included the development of a social and emotional framework that aligned with research-based theory. The responsibility of the scholarly practitioner included conducting various focus groups and administering surveys. The scholarly practitioner also managed data collection but collaborated with inquiry partners to analyze data and make any decisions regarding the revision of any theory of action.

Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the scope and sequence of this study, including the questions guiding this study, and the methods of inquiry and approaches to data analysis. This study was a mixed methods action research design that gathered both qualitative data and quantitative data in three phases. The data gathered after each phase was analyzed with collaborative inquiry partners to inform planning and implementation of the subsequent phase.

The focus of practice outlined in this study was the implementation of a social and emotional learning framework to support identified vulnerable youth isolated in remote learning environments as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, or COVID-19. In Phase I, qualitative and quantitative data was gathered from multiple data sources and analyzed with collaborative inquiry partners. In Phase II, implementation was divided into three sections. In Phase III, both qualitative data and quantitative data was gathered to gauge the effectiveness of impact on levels of student engagement and connectedness. The next chapter outlines the results of the data collection from each phase and reports results. The data collected in the study was analyzed after each phase for fidelity and reliability. At the conclusion of the study, the data can be used to

inform practice and implement changes in education approach to create more equitable learning environments.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This study was conducted at West Elementary School in one of the largest school districts in North Carolina. West Elementary is one of 23 Pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade elementary schools within the Western County Public School system. It has a population of over 600 students with 51% White, 22% Black, 15% Hispanic, and 12% other races.

The focus of practice at West Elementary School is the implementation of a social and emotional learning, online-mentoring framework to support identified vulnerable youth isolated in remote learning environments as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Vulnerable students often present with unmet psychological and physical needs, many of which could be exacerbated when forced to remain in potentially toxic or unstable environments as a result of quarantining related to the pandemic. The framework was intended to mitigate some of these unmet needs. The framework was designed to create opportunities for students to build relationships with trusted adults within the school as well as interact virtually with their peers.

This study was a mixed-methods, action research study framed around the theoretical foundations of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as well as the Science of Learning and Development model. The conceptual frameworks from The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and the Youth Mentoring Model also establish the paradigm of the study.

The questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. How is student engagement impacted by the implementation of a social and emotional mentoring framework for vulnerable youth isolated in a remote learning environment during a pandemic?

2. How is student connectedness impacted by the implementation of a social and emotional mentoring framework in a remote learning environment during a pandemic?
3. How does strategic professional development support staff in the ability to meet the needs of at-risk, vulnerable students?

This study was designed to take place during the COVID-19 pandemic. This presented challenges with implementation, but also set an environment to collect data that was timely and authentic given the necessary response to the global pandemic and the subsequent ramifications for schools. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to link findings to practices that could potentially decrease the level of trauma associated with a pandemic, promote wellness, maximize learning in unstable learning environments, and address learning needs of the whole child.

Implementation

This study was implemented in three phases. The first phase (Phase I) was planning and development as well as gathering baseline data. The second phase (Phase II) was the implementation of the social and emotional framework with small groups of students. This phase was segmented into three parts, and all three subsections encompassed weekly meetings, targeted instruction, independent activities, and data collection. The final phase of the study (Phase III) included the post-implementation data collection and analysis.

Phase I began with a pilot study to better inform future cycles of implementation. The Core Team was created and assisted with student selection. The Core Team members then participated in professional development. The professional development was focused on the depth and breadth of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks as well as content specific

training. The purpose of the professional development sessions was to orient the Core Team members with the scope and sequence of the study, including logistics and content. The professional development was divided into three sections: platform and implementation logistics, social and emotional learning overview that included the CASEL competencies, as well as successful mentoring and coaching. The professional development was delivered in two sessions. Both sessions of professional development were conducted by myself, as the scholarly practitioner who designed the lessons. The training was vetted by the social and emotional learning Interventionist for West Elementary. The professional development agenda with an overview of the topics is located in Figure 15.

Phase II encompassed the implementation of the online, social and emotional mentoring framework. Implementation included family meetings, student surveys, and focus groups. Family meetings were conducted once a week via the online platform, Google Meet, utilized by Western County Public Schools. Each meeting was scheduled to last approximately 45 minutes and the meeting included structured activities and response time. There were six lessons in total. The lesson plan for each respective topic is included in Appendix K, Appendix L, Appendix M, Appendix N, and Appendix P, as well as outlined in Table 9.

In Phase III, students participated in one of three student focus groups, each led by me in the role of the scholarly practitioner within a week of the culminating lesson. The three groups were kindergarten and first grade, second and third grade, and fourth and fifth grade. The purpose of the focus group was to discuss the learning that occurred as a result of the family meetings as well as the impact of the study on the student participants.

Logistics	Session 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Google Platform • Scheduling • Lesson Overviews • Book Reading • Activity preparation 	
SEL	Session 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CASEL • Self-Awareness • Self-Management • Social Awareness • Relationship Skills • Responsible Decision Making 	
Mentoring and Coaching	Session 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring • Coaching • Vulnerable students 	

Figure 15. Professional development agenda.

Table 9

Family Meeting Lesson Topics and Corresponding Appendices

Week/Lesson	Skills	Appendix
1	Self-Awareness	K
2	Self-Management	L
3	Social Awareness	M
4	Relationship Skills	N
5	Responsible Decision Making	O
6	Culminating Activity: We're All Wonders	P

Also, part of Phase II, the Core Team members engaged in a final focus group to analyze data gathered throughout the study and they reflected on the impact of the study. They also readministered the SEL Student Profile to the homeroom teachers of the students participating in the study. Post assessment data was discussed as part of the Glows and Grows portion of the social and emotional focus group protocol.

Data Collection

Within all three phases of this study, both qualitative and quantitative data was gathered from several types of instruments. Each of these data collection tools yielded several types of data for analysis. Data was gathered in person and in electronic formats. In Phase I, data was gathered from the pilot study, the social and emotional profiles completed the teachers, and the student self-assessment. In Phase II, data was collected from both the Core Team focus groups and student surveys to track changes in levels of school engagement and connectedness.

In Phase III, the social and emotional profiles and student self-assessments that were filled out pre-implementation were filled out a second time in Phase III/Post-Implementation. Also, during Phase III, students participated in a focus group with other students in grade-alike bands to reflect on their experiences during the study as well as to guide implications and recommendations for future study. The triangulated convergence of data collected from varied sources, including the perspectives from multiple participants, ensures validity with findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The collection methods and the analysis approach is outlined in the next section by each collection tool. Table 10 provides a brief overview of the three phases, corresponding data collection instrumentation, and the type of data each instrument yielded.

Table 10

Data Collection Instruments and Corresponding Data Types

Action Research Cycle	Data Collection Instrument	Qualitative Data	Quantitative Data
Phase I	Pilot Study: Focus Group	X	
	SEL profiles (Pre)	X	X
	Student Self-Assessment (Pre)		X
Phase II	Student Survey Data	X	X
	Core Team Focus Group	X	
Phase III	SEL profiles (Post)	X	X
	Student Self-Assessment (Post)		X
	Student Focus Groups	X	

Data Analysis

Social and Emotional Student Profiles

The social and emotional student profiles gathered both qualitative and quantitative data, organizing demographic information about each participant and baseline data on engagement levels and understanding of the five CASEL social and emotional themes: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (see Appendix I). Each of these questions was answered using a Likert-type scale. The responses were used to identify a quantified increase or decrease in responses between the start and end of the study as well as coding of the open-ended responses for a potential analysis of the cause of the change.

Student Self-Assessment

The student self-assessment (see Appendix J) gathered quantitative data from the student participants. The survey asked for level of agreement to five statements using a Likert scale. Question 1 (*I like school*) and Question 4 (*I am excited about logging into school meetings to learn*) measured levels of engagement while Question 2 (*I feel like I have friends at school*) and Question 3 (*I feel like people at school care about me*) measured levels of connectedness. Question 5 (*I have all the things I need at home to be successful*) was created with the purpose of meeting physical needs of the students in this study. These assessments were administered pre and post study implementation to quantify the increase or decrease in levels of agreement between the start and the end of the study.

Student Survey Data

After each family meeting, students were administered a student survey. This survey gathered both qualitative and quantitative data about the student perceptions surrounding school as well as changes in levels of connectedness and engagement. The first two questions checked

on the social and emotional health of the child with the purpose of helping the mentor gain insight into the child's life to build mutuality and trust. The third and fourth questions were created to solicit open-ended responses to measure the impact of the framework from the perspective of the student participant. These responses were analyzed using varied coding procedures (open coding and expected coding) for identification and categorizing of themes. The last two questions on the student survey were designed to gauge the change in levels of engagement week by week during Phase II. Data gathered from these last two questions was organized into percentages for comparison.

Focus Groups

At the conclusion of the implementation of the social and emotional mentoring framework, the students participated in a focus group discussion. Students met in three different groups: kindergarten and first grade, second and third grade, as well as fourth and fifth grade students. Each group of students was asked four questions. The purpose of the focus group was to gather qualitative data on student perception of impact of the framework as well as the impact of the mentoring component. The intent was to gather themes surrounding the limitations of the study, as well as implications and recommendations for further research. Appendix T outlines the questions for each grade band that measured levels of engagement and connectedness.

The Core Team met three times in Phase II with the purpose of reflecting on the implementation of the lesson and to gather qualitative data for analysis surrounding all three questions within the study. The qualitative data was analyzed through a grounded theory model in which open coding was first used to identify major ideas to focus on. From that point the data was organized in groups to build more specific themes regarding levels of engagement, connectedness, and the impact of professional development.

Validity of Results

Valid data collection and accurate representation of data is essential for any study. To ensure validity in this study, data was collected from various sources for triangulation (Mertler, 2019). Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected from SEL profiles, student self-assessments, student surveys, and the student and staff focus groups. The qualitative data was charted, and the data was used to calculate several outcomes including response rates, changes in perceptions, and changes in agreement levels. The quantitative data was collected from open ended responses, dialogue from the student and staff focus groups, as well as memos and notes.

The organization of large amounts of data into smaller sections for study is known as coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative data coding was implemented in this study to analyze the impact of the online social and emotional mentoring framework on levels of engagement and connection. The qualitative responses in this study were organized into groups based on the type of collection tool: social and emotional learning profiles, student survey, student focus groups, and staff focus groups. Each group yielded multiple responses.

Creswell and Poth (2018) indicate that after organizing and managing the qualitative data, the next step is the identification of emerging ideas. The responses within each group were read and reviewed multiple times. The first read of each group was an open code- no specific ideas were looked for. The focus was on word choice of the participants and key words were highlighted within each text. The highlighted words in each group were re-read and charted into lists by the type of data collection tool, and the lists of highlighted words became named codes.

The next step in the process was to organize the codes into categories. The classification of the words into categories is an essential step in data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the narratives from the student surveys, the student focus groups, and the staff focus

groups yielded many codes that were roughly organized into large categories. Each of the large categories were then divided into several sub-categories, including actions (words that may focus on engagement) and feelings (words that could potentially link to connectedness). From the categories, several key themes emerged and will be outlined in the Results section.

Demographics

Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted at West Elementary. Each participant completed a demographic questionnaire, located in Appendix F. There were four staff members that participated in the pilot study, all females. The years of teaching experience varied from less than five years to less than five years from retiring. The pilot group represented various groups of staff within the building.

Core Team

The Core Team was composed of six West Elementary School staff members. These staff members that participated in the pilot study were different than the staff members that elected to be members of the Core Team. There were four female and two male members on the Core Team. Figure 16 displays the gender makeup of the Core Team, while Table 11 indicates the grade level makeup of the Core Team by position. Figure 17 provides the years of experience in education of each Core Team member.

Student Participants

There were 21 students that participated in the study. These students were elected by the virtual teachers after presenting with one or more of the characteristics that the staff at West Elementary deemed to be at-risk, or vulnerable. Invitations went to students from kindergarten to fifth grade. Initially, less than fifteen students elected to participate. With the collaboration

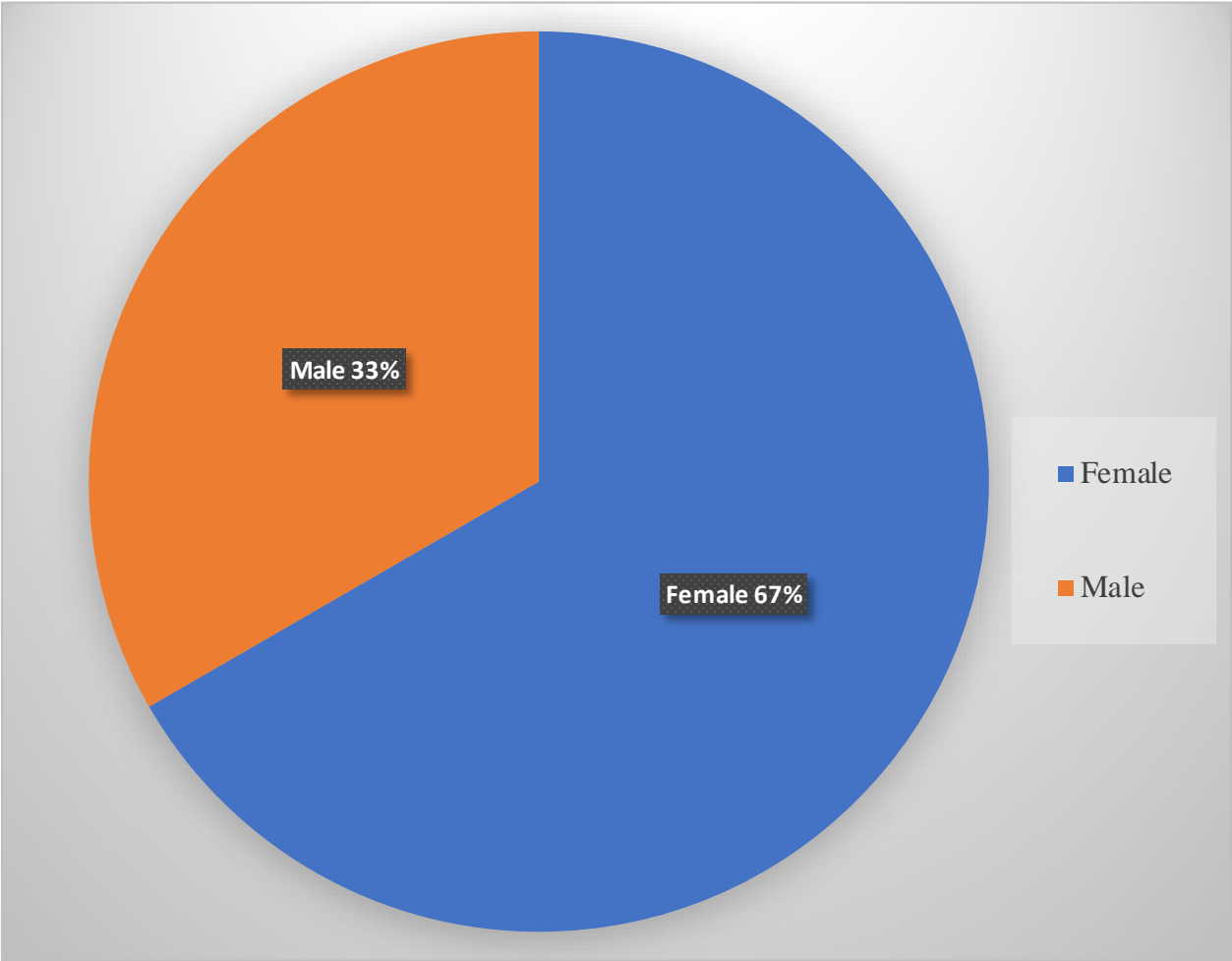


Figure 16. Gender of core team participants.

Table 11

Position of Core Team Members

K-2	3-5	Enhancement	Exceptional Children	Classified
1	2	1	1	1

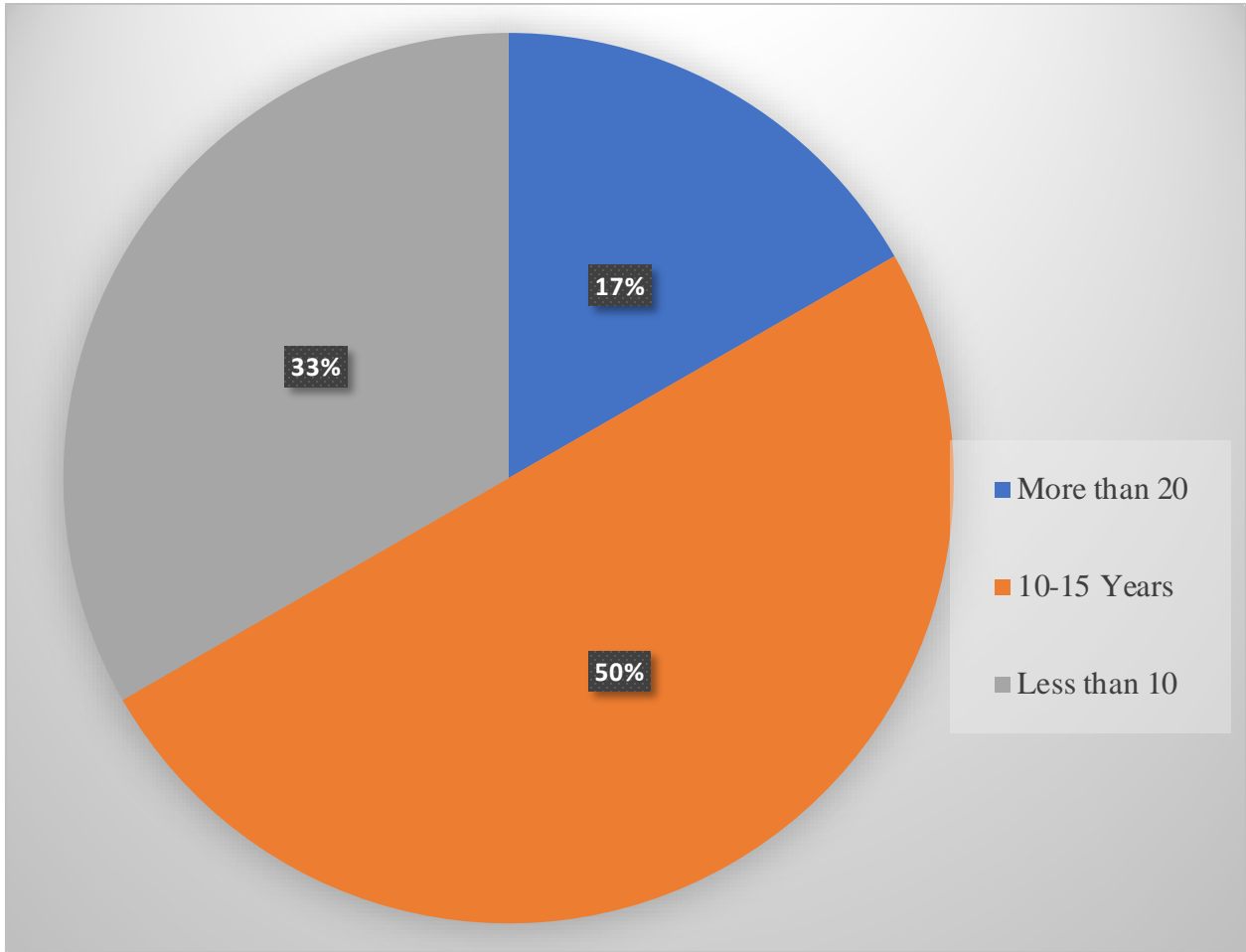


Figure 17. Years of experience of core team participants.

between the staff at West Elementary and the research team, six more students elected to participate at the start of Phase I. The gender breakdown of the student participants is in Figure 18 and the ethnicity of the student participants is in Figure 19. Table 12 aligns these demographics to each participant.

Each of the twenty-one students were assigned to three teams. Each team was assigned a color: blue, red, or yellow. The colors had no significance in the study and was used for identification purposes only. The breakdown of the gender and ethnicity of each color team is outlined in Table 13.

Results

Multiple data collection tools were used to gather quantitative and qualitative data to examine the effectiveness of the implementation of the social and emotional framework. The results section is organized by study question, supported by the triangulation of the various data types collected to help in answering each question. Table 14 illustrates the relationships between each study question and the data collection instrument used to answer each study question.

Study Question 1

The first study question asked, How is student engagement impacted by the implementation of a social and emotional mentoring framework for vulnerable youth isolated in a remote learning environment during a pandemic? Student engagement refers to how involved or interested students appear to be in school or with a specific topic (Axelson & Flick, 2010). The intent of the framework was to increase levels of participation and involvement of students that are behaviorally, socially, or academically at risk by creating relationships with trusted adults. These adults would focus on teaching students foundational social and emotional skills

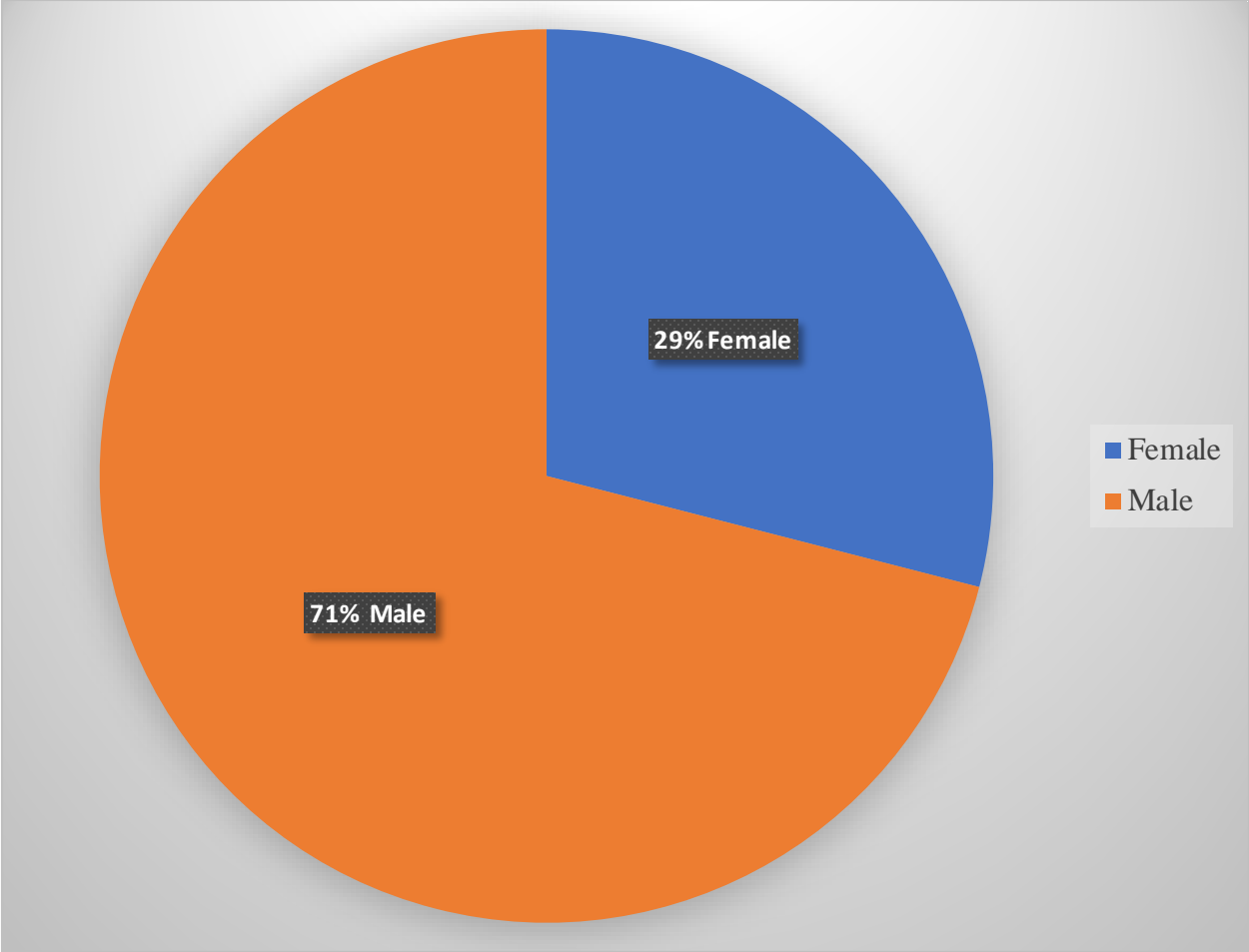


Figure 18. Gender of student participants.

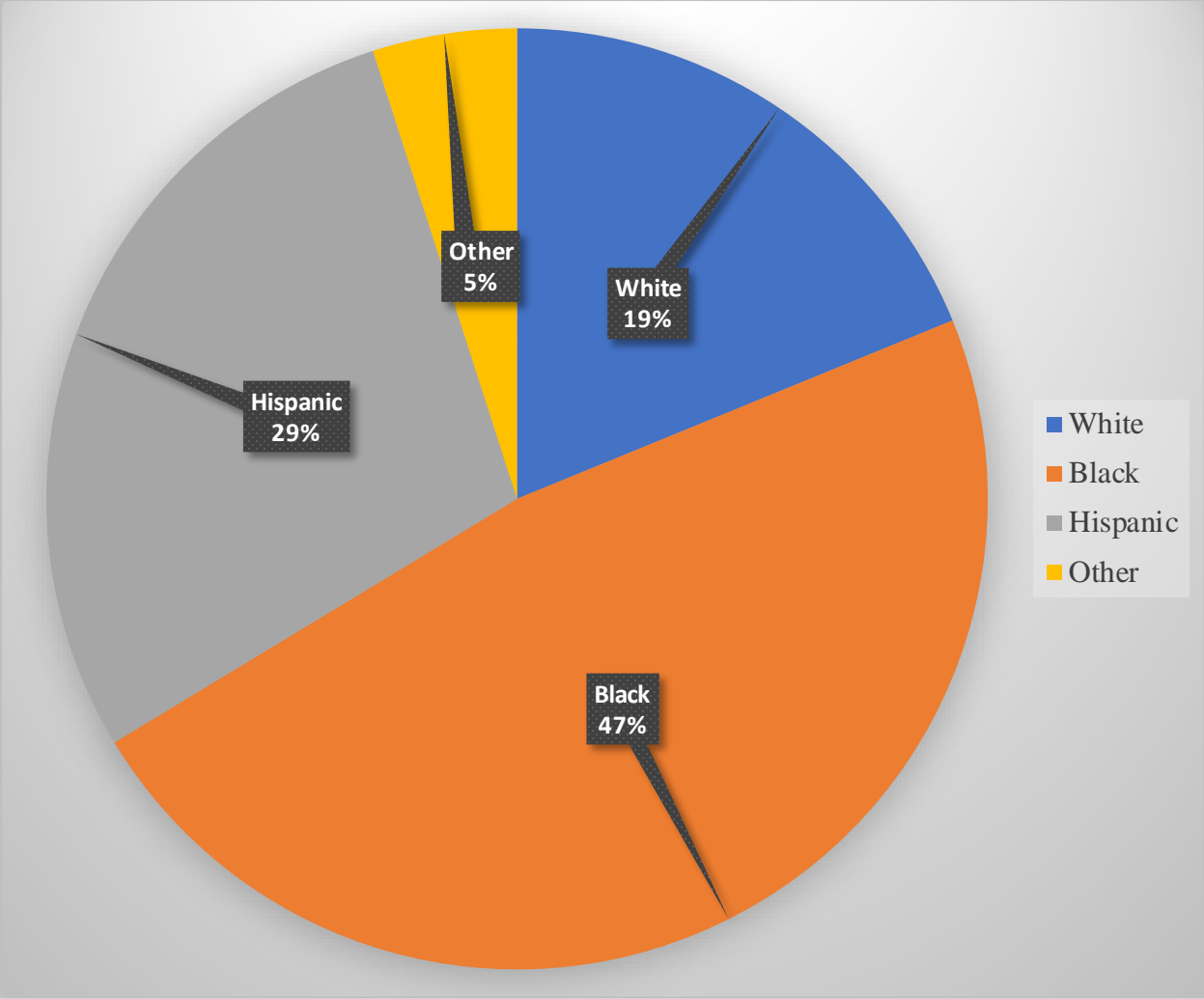


Figure 19. Ethnicity of student participants.

Table 12

Student Participant Demographic Information

Identifier	Family	Grade Level	Gender	Race
A	BLUE	Kinder	M	H
B	RED	Kinder	M	B
C	YELLOW	First	F	H
D	RED	First	M	B
E	RED	First	M	H
F	BLUE	First	F	W
G	YELLOW	First	F	B
H	YELLOW	Second	M	B
I	RED	Second	M	B
J	BLUE	Second	M	W
K	YELLOW	Third	F	H
L	BLUE	Third	F	B
M	RED	Third	M	B
N	BLUE	Fourth	M	W
O	RED	Fourth	M	O
P	YELLOW	Fifth	M	B
Q	BLUE	Fifth	F	B
R	YELLOW	Fifth	M	W
S	RED	Fifth	M	B
T	YELLOW	Fifth	M	H
U	BLUE	Fifth	M	H

Table 13

Family Gender and Ethnicity

Family	Blue	Red	Yellow
Gender	4 male 3 female	7 male 0 female	4 male 3 female
Ethnicity	3- White 2- Black 1- Hispanic 0 -Other	0- White 5- Black 1- Hispanic 1 -Other	1- White 3- Black 3- Hispanic 0 -Other

Table 14

Data Collection Tool Alignment

Data Collection Instrument

	Study Question		
	#1	#2	#3
Pilot Study: Focus Group	X	X	X
SEL Profiles	X	X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-Implementation • Post-Implementation 			
Student Self-Assessment	X	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-Implementation • Post-Implementation 			
Student Survey Data	X	X	
Core Team Focus Group	X	X	X
Student Focus Groups Grade Alike Bands	X	X	

necessary for productive and successful interactions. Both qualitative and quantitative data from multiple sources was gathered to identify impact of implementation on levels of engagement as well as identify emerging themes as a result of implementation. The impact of specific data collection tools on study question 1 is outlined below.

Student Self-Assessment

Prior to the implementation of the framework, the student self-assessment was given, and the results were calculated to establish a baseline of levels of both engagement and connectedness. When implementation concluded, students were readministered the self-assessment. Each question on the assessment provided a statement with a Likert scale from 1-10 underneath measuring levels of agreement. Each scale score was converted to a percentage and the average percentage for each grade level was calculated. Figures 20-25 represented the data from the Pre-Assessment and Post-Assessment for each grade level, kindergarten through fifth grade, respectively. The bars on each graph represent the average score for the entire grade level and display the change in levels of agreement to each of these statements as a result of implementation of the framework.

While there were slight fluctuations in each grade level data, there were several trends that emerged. The data indicated that prior to the implementation of the framework, students in the lower grades (grades K-2) liked school more than students in the upper grades (grades 3-5), as represented by higher percentages in each of the pre-assessment columns. When looking at individual grade level data, students in grades kindergarten, first, and fifth indicated increases in agreement to the first statement on the assessment *I like school*. Second grade students indicated no change after implementation, and students in third and fourth grade indicated a decrease in agreement to this statement.

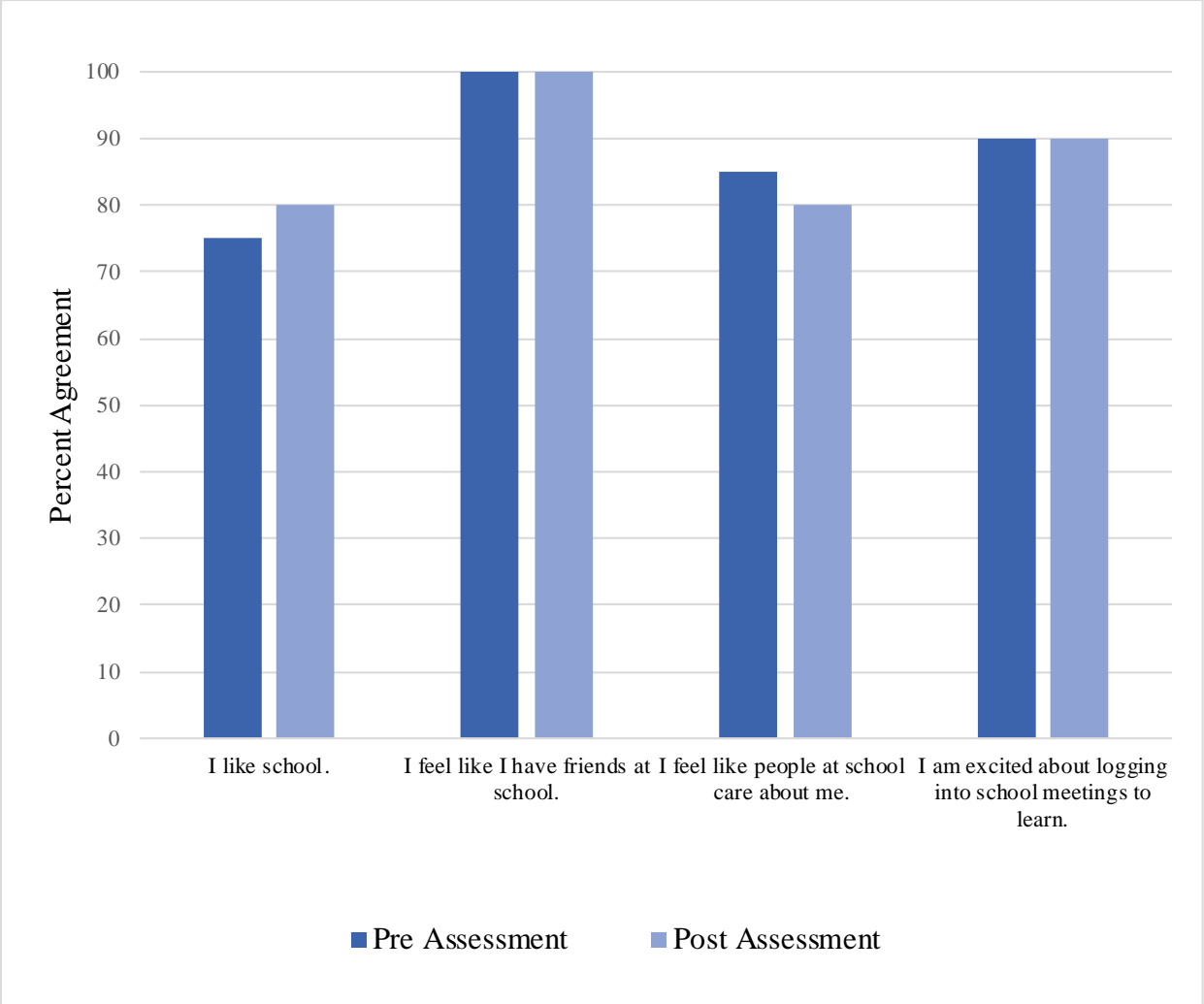


Figure 20. Pre and post assessment data kindergarten.

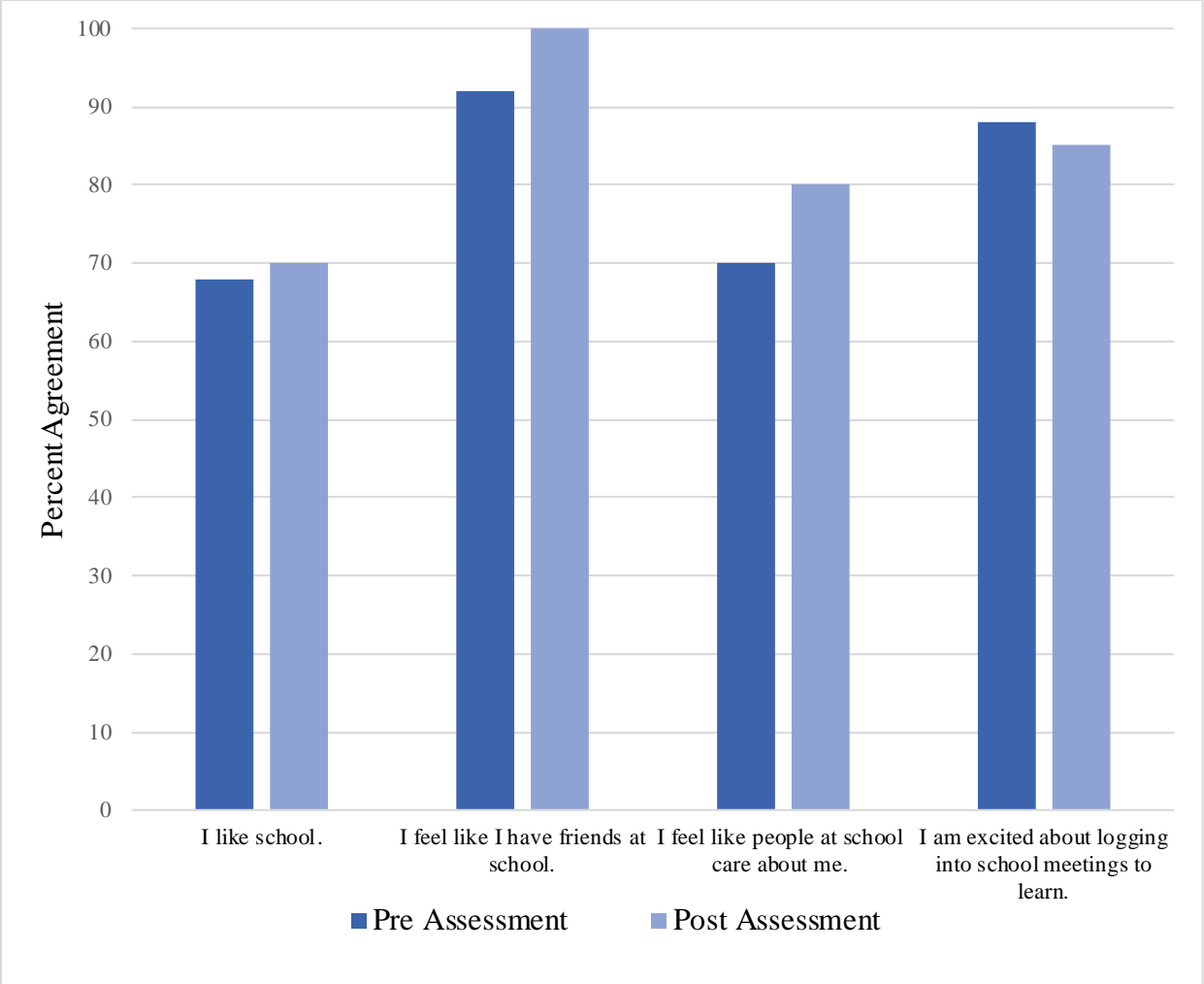


Figure 21. Pre and post assessment data first grade.

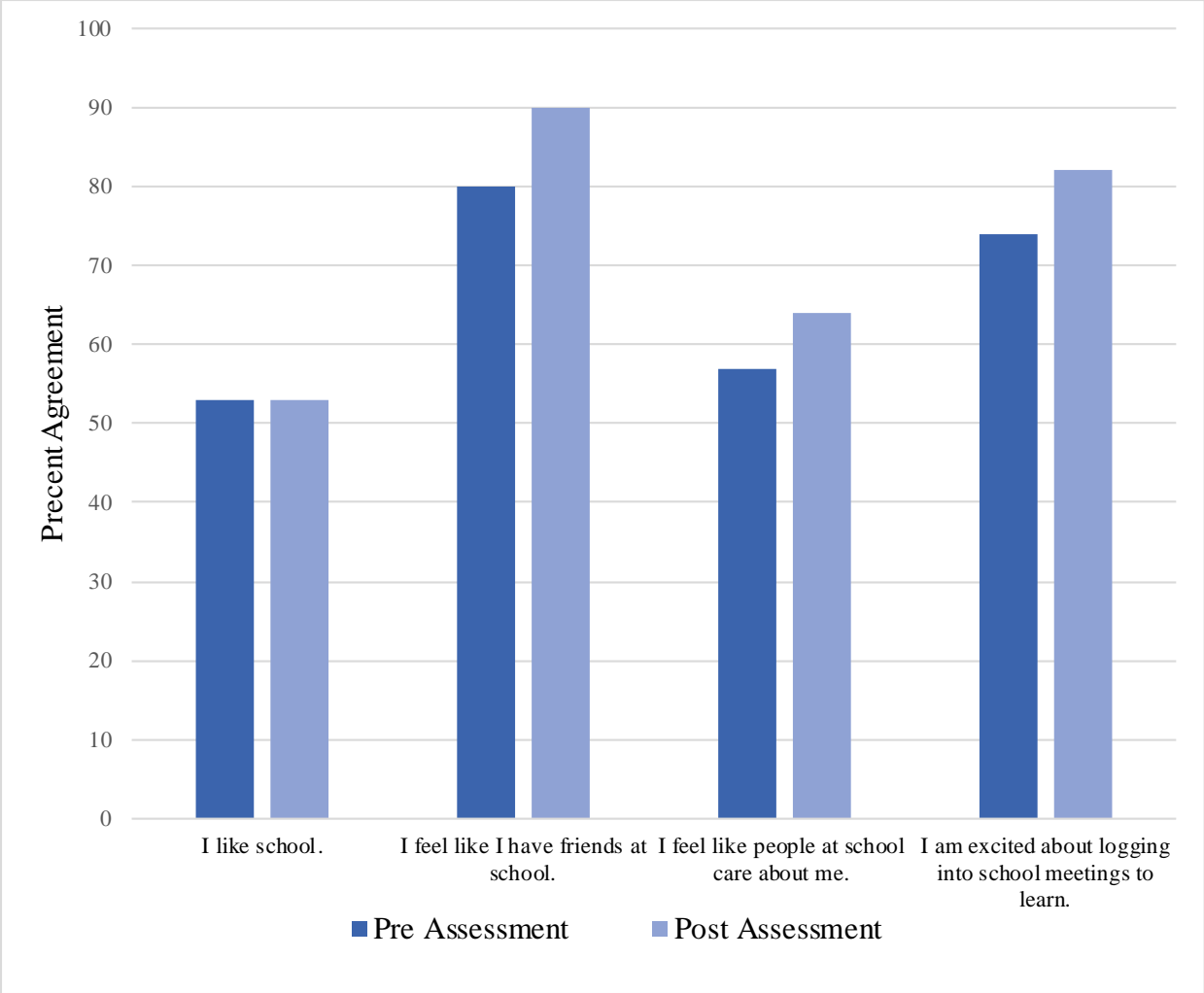


Figure 22. Pre and post assessment data second grade.

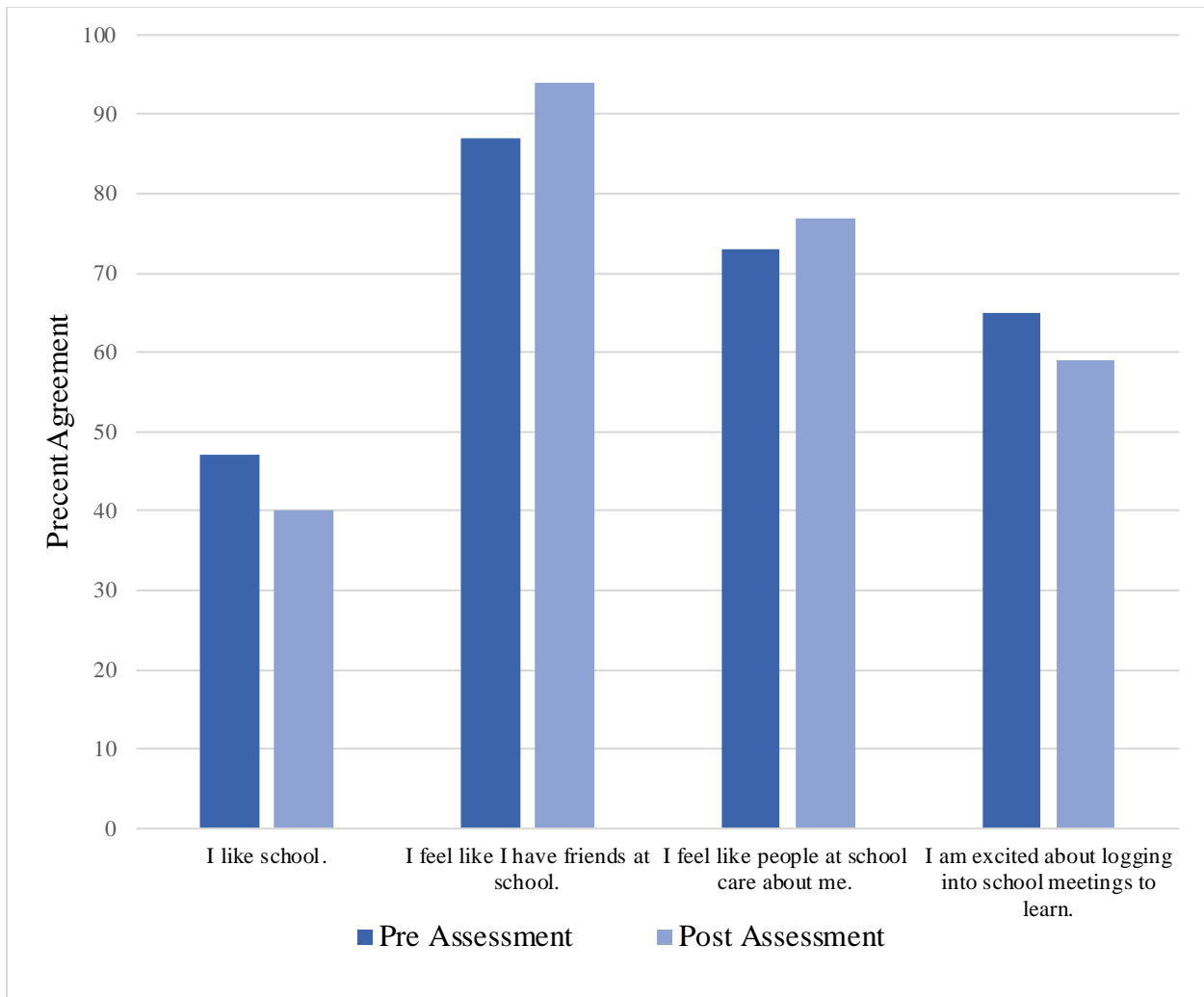


Figure 23. Pre and post assessment data third grade.

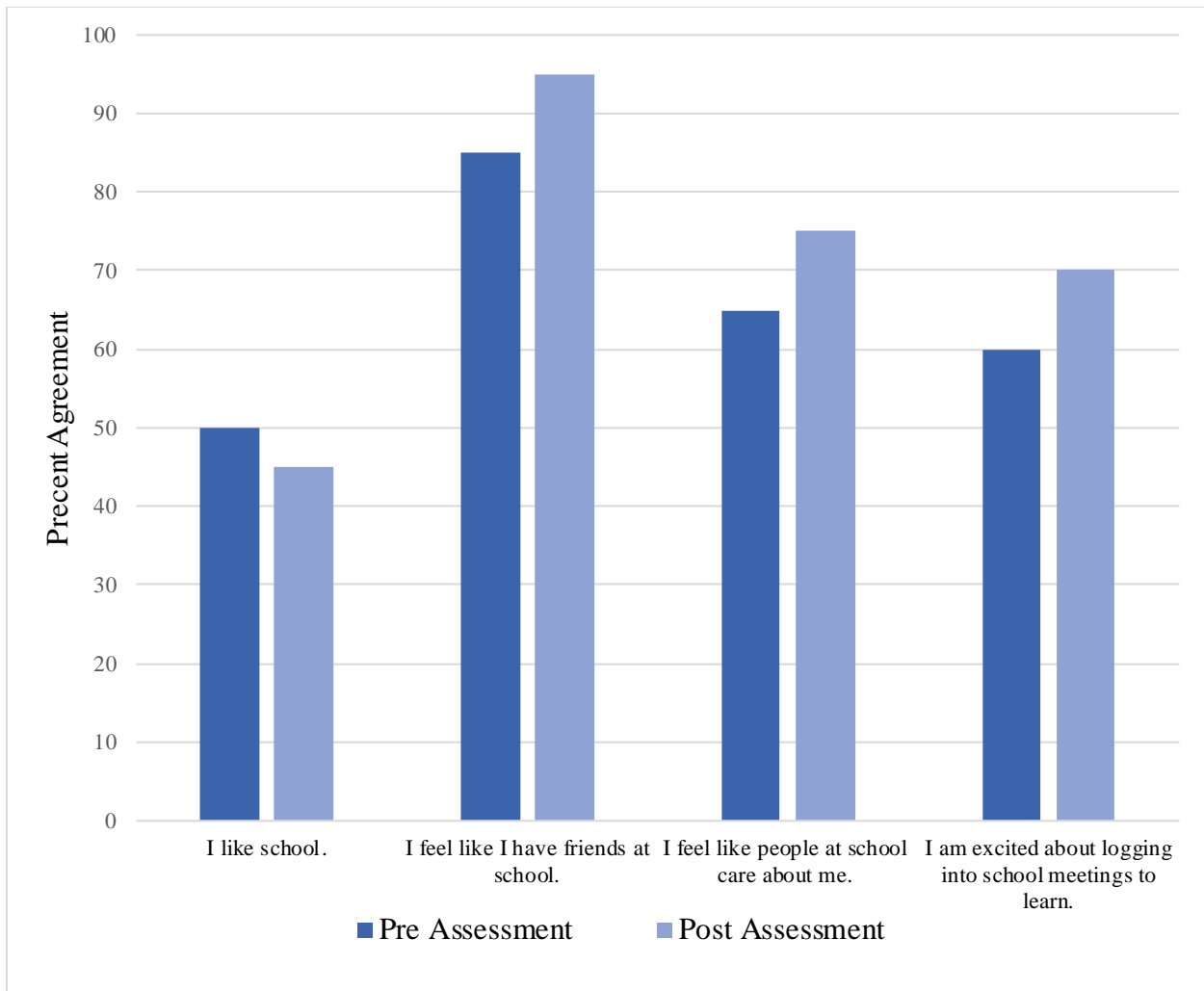


Figure 24. Pre and post assessment data fourth grade.

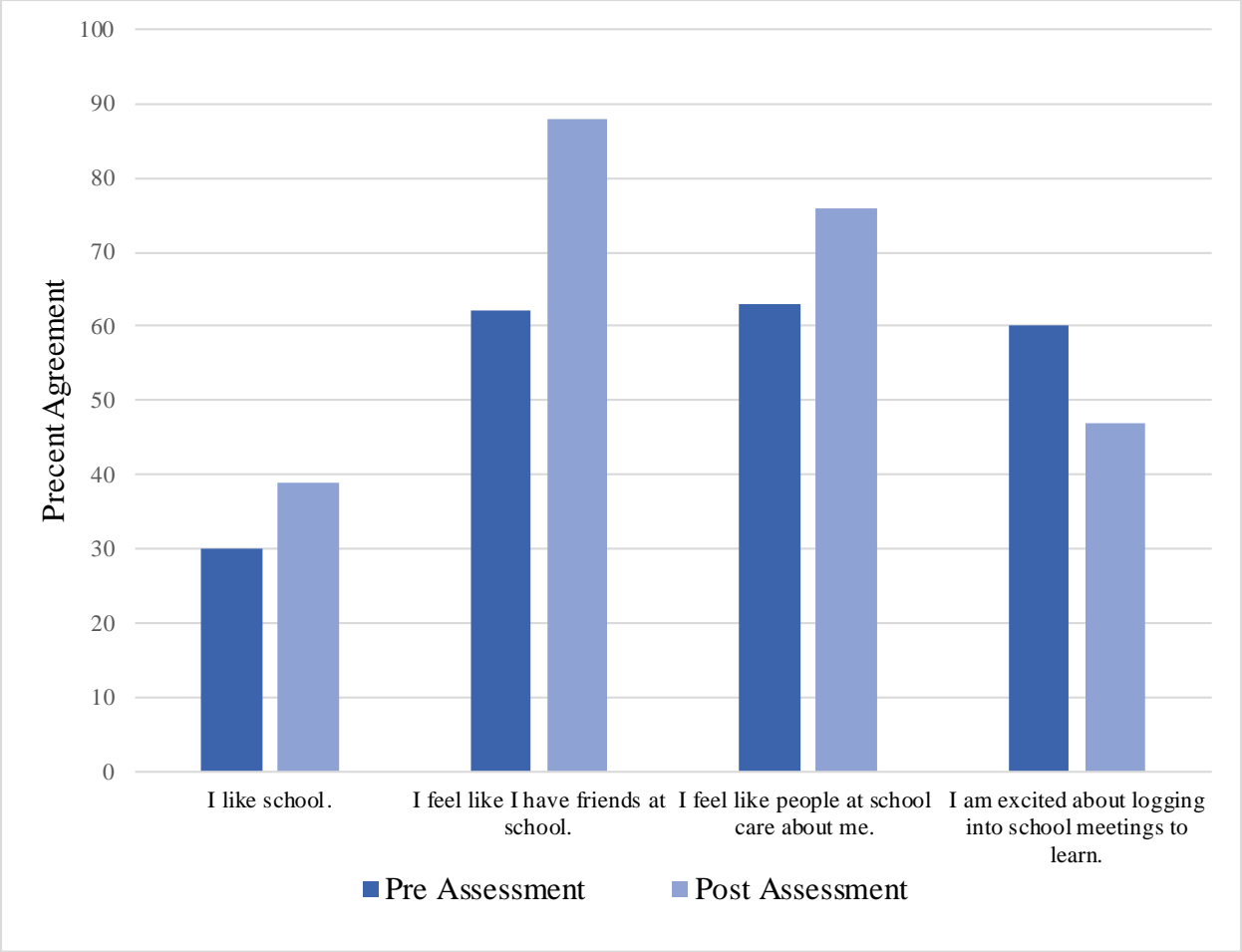


Figure 25. Pre and post assessment data fifth grade.

Question two asked for levels of agreement to the statement *I feel like I have friends at school*. Data from the student self-assessment indicated that all grade levels indicated an increase in percentage after implementation of the framework, except for kindergarten. Kindergarten percentages remained the same, however the score was 100% agreement in both the pre-assessment and post-assessment columns.

The third question measured levels of agreement to the statement *I feel like people at school care about me*. Again, all grade levels indicated increases in levels of agreement after implementation of the framework, except for kindergarten. There was a slight decrease for this grade level, but the student sample for this grade level was only two students. One student indicated a score of 8 on the pre-assessment and a score of 7 on the post-assessment.

The fourth question collected data regarding the levels of agreement to the statement *I am excited about logging into school meetings to learn*. There were variations across the grade level outcomes. Students in second and fourth indicated higher levels of agreement to this statement after implementation. Kindergarten students indicated no change as a result of implementation, and there were decreased percentages for students in first, third, and fifth grade at the end of the implementation phase.

The student self-assessment measured levels of engagement and connectedness. Question 1 (*I like school*) and Question 4 (*I am excited about logging into school meetings to learn*) measured levels of engagement while Question 2 (*I feel like I have friends at school*) and Question 3 (*I feel like people at school care about me*) measured levels of connectedness. From this perspective, data indicated that there was a greater positive impact on levels of connectedness than levels of engagement as a result of the implementation of the online, mentoring framework. The outcomes, organized by topic, statement, and percentage change are

organized in Figure 26. The data further supported that the framework created overall increased positive outcomes for students, as three of the four questions had an increase in levels of agreement from the beginning to the end of the study. With a decrease in the levels of agreement from the beginning to the end of the study, the impact on engagement would need to be explored further with the other data sources in order to determine whether the framework made a positive impact on engagement.

Student Survey

The last two questions on the student survey related to levels of engagement and these questions explored work completion and attendance. The response rates to questions about CASEL competencies for students in grades K-2 and 3-5 are outlined in Table 15 and Table 16. For students in grades K-2, the percentage of students that were completing all work and attending school was inconsistent each week. Many of the students in this age group were at day care facilities and were not in environments that supported academics consistently, while students in the 3rd-5th grade group were at home more than the younger students. These students were able to independently log on to the computer to “attend” class as well as complete work in the assigned platforms more independently.

While the students in upper grades had lower levels of positive percentages at the start of the study, these students had mostly consistent increases. When asked the question, *After this meeting, do you feel better, worse, or the same?* students that indicated a change in feeling did not reference any of the lessons. These participants instead connected their feelings to an event within the meeting or outside the meetings. After giving an indicator that Student Participant E felt “worse,” the student indicated the reason was that he did not get to share. The student

Student Self-Assessment Questions measuring Levels of Engagement																		
	Kindergarten Percentages			First Grade Percentages			Second Grade Percentages			Third Grade Percentages			Fourth Grade Percentages			Fifth Grade Percentages		
	Pre	Post	Type of Change	Pre	Post	Type of Change	Pre	Post	Type of Change	Pre	Post	Type of Change	Pre	Post	Type of Change	Pre	Post	Type of Change
Q# 1) I like school.	75	80	+	68	70	+	53	53	=	47	40	-	50	45	-	30	93	+
Q# 4) I am excited about logging into school meetings to learn.	90	90	=	88	85	-	74	82	+	65	59	-	60	70	+	60	47	-
Student Self-Assessment Questions measuring Levels of Connectedness																		
	Pre	Post	Type of Change	Pre	Post	Type of Change	Pre	Post	Type of Change	Pre	Post	Type of Change	Pre	Post	Type of Change	Pre	Post	Type of Change
Q# 2) I feel like I have friends at school.	100	100	=	92	100	+	80	90	+	87	94	+	85	95	+	62	88	+
Q# 3) I feel like people at school care about me.	85	80	-	70	80	+	57	64	+	73	77	+	65	75	+	63	76	+

Figure 26. Student self-assessment responses across grade levels.

Table 15

Response Rates to Questions About CASEL Competencies (Grades K-2)

Question	Self-Awareness/ Self-Management	Social Awareness and Relationship Skills	Responsible Decision Making
Did you do all of your work from your teacher this week?	100%	90%	70%
Did you attend school every day this week?	70%	60%	80%

Table 16

Response Rates to Questions About CASEL Competencies (Grades 3-5)

Question	Self-Awareness/ Self-Management	Social Awareness and Relationship Skills	Responsible Decision Making
Did you do all of your work from your teacher this week?	52%	82%	82%
Did you attend school every day this week?	64%	73%	91%

completed all assignments that week and attended all the classes he was supposed to.

Conversely, several students in both the K-2 and 3-5 groups indicated that after the meeting they felt “better,” the reasons listed were mostly related to the interactions with peers or the group, rather than any component of the framework. Student Participant F stated she “liked listening to the books” as the reason as to why she felt “better” after the meeting. She also had done all her work that week and completed all assignments. When answering the question *Name one way the meeting was helpful*, the responses again were centered around interactions and the impact on peer relationships. Student Participant L shared those meetings “helped me to learn a lesson,” and Student Participant B stated he could “see my friends.”

Core Team Focus Group

The first question of the Core Team focus group protocol focused on quantifying the levels of participation and engagement and several ideas and concepts began to emerge after this discussion. The protocol for the discussion asked about both glows (positive outcomes) and grows (areas for improvement) after implementation.

When asked to share about positives surrounding implementation, Core Team member 1 noted that the lesson format was easy to follow. In this study, the content of each lesson was tied to research based social and emotional strategies and the literature was intentionally extrapolated from research based social and emotional curriculums. However, several responses from the Core Team members indicated that one *Grow* to consider is that several other books could be great alternatives from the books that were chosen for this study. Core Team member 5 stated, “We could use this (framework) to add in all sorts of literature from other cultures and I know of several books that other teachers have talked about using.” With the focus of the discussion focusing on areas of improvement for implementation of the lesson, Core Team member 3 asked,

“Could we ask the kids what books they like?” and Core Team member 3 stated “That could get them more interested and engaged maybe.”

However, there was consensus from the Core Team members that while the lessons were well organized and the resources were adequate, any impact that the framework might make had less to do with the organization of research, resources, or materials, and more to do with the time that was invested into the students at the family meetings. The investment in the development of a trusted and caring relationship as a result of the mentoring opportunities, was believed to have the greatest impact on engagement factors like work completion and attendance. Responses from Core Team members support the findings that the interactions with the students can make an impact on student behaviors. During a discussion surrounding engagement, Core Team member 5 also stated, “They need someone to hold them accountable. And for them to know that someone is checking in on them. I love books. But the books are just extra to me in all of this.”

Relationships Are More Important Than Content

The qualitative data from the student self-assessment, the student surveys, as well as focus group data were analyzed and coded to identify several important key themes as a result of implementation. The qualitative codes were then compared to the quantitative findings to identify any alignment of ideas between the two types of data. These findings were then intersected with the theoretical frameworks of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and the Science of Learning and Development Model.

The expectation was that the learning environment, when built upon relationships and attachments, would positively impact the student desire to connect with the school environment. The Science of Learning and Development Model indicates that learning is connected to all

contexts, is influenced by the experiences and interactions within a child's life, and therefore learning is a personal and individualized process (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

The qualitative data indicated that engagement levels did not increase consistently, nor did any one component of the framework make a noticeable difference on the levels of engagement. When exploring the open-ended responses from students to seek any relationship with quantitative data, the analysis instead indicated that increases or decreases in engagement are not tied to one specific strategy or program. Rather the levels of involvement and interest with a specific topic and the variations in the formative data were impacted more by the personalized interactions with peers and trusted adults. The data from this study supports the concept that learning is personalized and the impact of the implementation of the framework is positive but does not support a strong relationship to the levels of school engagement.

Study Question 2

The second study question asked, How is student connectedness impacted by the implementation of a social and emotional mentoring framework in a remote learning environment during a pandemic? Connectedness is defined as the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported in the school social environment (Goodenow, 1993). As it relates to connectedness, the intent of the framework was to increase the levels of involvement and feelings of acceptance as a result of the small group meetings and the relationship that is built with a trusted adult.

Student Self-Assessment

Question 2 and Question 3 from the student self-assessment were designed to measure increases or decreases of these levels. Question 2 asked students to rate levels of agreement to the statement *I feel like I have friends at school* while Question 3 rated levels of agreement to the

statement *I feel like people at school care about me*. For both Question 2 and Question 3, there was an increase in responses for almost all grade levels from the beginning of the study to the end of the study, as summarized in Table 15. These data indicate that there was a positive impact on levels of connectedness in students as a result of the implementation of the framework as measured by these two questions.

Student Survey

When examining the impact of the CASEL lessons, as measured by the student survey data, responses for students in grades K-2 indicated a more favorable impact than students in grades 3-5. The student survey question, *After this meeting do you feel better, worse, or the same?*, was created to measure the levels of connection and connectedness after each phase of the study. The outcome of this question from the student survey is outlined in Table 17 and Table 18. Table 17 outlines student perspective of the impact of the CASEL lessons for students in grades Kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. Table 18 outlines student perspective of the impact of the CASEL lessons for students in third grade, fourth grade, and fifth grade. These data indicate that the majority of the K-2 student participants felt “better,” a few indicated “same,” and less than 20% indicated “worse” at any point during the implementation of the CASEL lessons. Similarly, the majority of the participants in grades 3-5 felt “better,” a few indicated “same,” and less than 9% indicated “worse” at any point as a result of the implementation of the CASEL lessons.

Student and Core Team Focus Group

For Study Question 2, in addition to the responses from the student self-assessment and student survey, open-ended responses from the student focus group and the Core Team focus group were also analyzed. During Phase III of the study, both the students and the Core Team

Table 17

Student Perspectives of Impact of CASEL Lessons for Students in Grades K-2

After this meeting, how do you feel?	Self-Awareness/ Self-Management	Social Awareness and Relationship Skills	Responsible Decision Making
Better	60%	70%	60%
Same	30%	30%	20%
Worse	10%	0%	20%

Table 18

Student Perspectives of Impact of CASEL Lessons for Students in Grades 3-5

After this meeting, how do you feel?	Self-Awareness/ Self-Management	Social Awareness and Relationship Skills	Responsible Decision Making
Better	18%	18%	27%
Same	82%	82%	64%
Worse	0%	0%	9%

participated in culminating focus groups to reflect on the framework, including implementation and impact of the framework.

When examining the specific question, *At which meeting did you learn the most? What did you learn?* from the student focus groups, the majority of the responses from the participants indicated they learned the most from the first meeting. This meeting focused on the CASEL competency of Self-Awareness. In this meeting, students were focused on sharing traits about themselves that they liked or admired and were given the opportunity to start an “All About Me” activity. Students were given time to create unstructured responses with a focus on share time and interaction. This lesson design was intentional to allow gracious space to share as each student participant wished to do so.

Most of the responses from both the students and the staff focus groups referenced learning details and facts about *who* was in the group, rather than facts about the competency or the social and emotional learning. During a student focus group, when asked *What else do you want to add?*, Student Participant 15 stated, “I liked telling about me. I have a lot to say.” This is supported by the response from Core Team member 1 who stated, “It was awesome to learn so much about kids that usually show out in class or who are not present consistently,” and Core Team Member 4 added, “I got to learn about students who typically keep to themselves, and they also learned the stuff we shared about us. It is about making those connections.”

Towards the end of the study, after reading *First Come the Zebra*, the Core Team members commented on a noticeable difference in not only the comfort level of the children, but how much more they were sharing. This family meeting focused on the CASEL competency Relationship Skills and, in the story, the two characters were required to interact even though they were from different villages, playing a game of mancala. A virtual mancala game ensued

unexpectedly in one group and two Core Team Participants noted that the children delighted in each other, as they were enjoying the time they spent together. The student participants also echoed the sentiments of the adults, as supported by the response data from the student survey as well as the student focus groups that playing a game with a friend resulted in happy feelings as a result of these meetings. After the meeting on Self-Awareness, one student participant stated that the meeting on helped him “see less red.” When examining the collective responses from the students in all focus groups as well as the reflections from the staff, one important central idea emerged.

The Type of Connections Matter

Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data was used to determine impact on study question two which examines the levels of connectedness as a result of the implementation of the framework. The analysis of qualitative data from the student self-assessment, the student surveys, as well as focus group data yielded an important key theme. The emergent theme was compared to the quantitative findings and then intersected with the theoretical frameworks of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and the Science of Learning and Development Model.

The expectation was that the implementation would make a positive impact on the levels of acceptance, respect, inclusion, and support for each of the student participants. When viewed through the conceptual lenses of the CASEL Social and Emotional Learning framework, the expectation was for the framework to serve as an equalizer for students that were facing greater challenges than their peers and teach skills that students need to increase perceptions of inclusion.

The qualitative data indicated that connectedness was positively impacted by the framework, as supported by the student perception levels as a result of implementation. When

exploring the open-ended responses from students to seek alignment with quantitative data, the adults mentioned significance of the interactions that were occurring as they were often very different than the typical interaction in class. It was noted by several Core Team members that the older students were sharing personal anecdotes about family and friends, which the Core Team members indicated is not typical from this age group. Student participants noted the impact of the opportunity to share personal stories about themselves. The data postulated that the implementation of the framework was beneficial overall but was very successful in creating positive outcomes on the levels of connectedness for elementary students isolated in remote learning environments.

Study Question 3

The final study question was, How does strategic professional development support staff in the ability to meet the needs of at-risk, vulnerable students? Research indicates that professional development is effective when it is long term, has a specific focus, and occurs in an authentic environment (Borko et al., 2010). The professional development for this study was divided into three sections: platform and implementation logistics, social and emotional learning information that included an overview of CASEL competencies, as well as mentoring and coaching. The professional development was designed to inform the Core Team members on facilitation of the lessons that they would be leading as well as give a brief overview of social and emotional learning foundations, including the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The professional development was delivered to Core Team members over two sessions.

Core Team Focus Group

Core Team members participated in the professional development prior to implementation and several focus group conversations throughout the span of the study. At each

meeting, the Core Team was asked about any student issues that needed to be addressed. Some of the concerns mentioned were physical needs such as food or school supplies. After the first module and at the end of the study, participants both times mentioned that the students seemed to be most needing attention as students seemed to be sharing about personal things happening in the home. Both times the conversations with the Core Team centered around these central questions: *What can we do? How can we help?* The Core Team members agreed that they felt ill-prepared to deal with some of the at-home issues of these students. Core Team member 3 used the word “overwhelming” and once Core Team member 5 asked the group, “What kinds of needs do your students have?” A discussion continued about one student mentioning hunger and Core Team member 2 stated that one student was holding an infant sibling on her lap and feeding the infant while participating.

The Core Team participated in one additional meeting after the culminating sixth family meeting (see Appendix Q) at the conclusion of the study to engage in discussion about the activities and the effectiveness of the lesson designs. At this final meeting, the Core Team was asked for reflections on the scope of implementation, rather than one specific lesson. The responses ranged from reflections on personal feelings about the experience, implementation successes, suggestions for improvement, and feedback on the professional development that was designed for this study. The Core Team members agreed that professional development is essential to support the needs of at-risk, vulnerable students, however the professional development that was designed for this study received more suggestions for improvement from Core Team members than it received accolades. The feedback from the Core Team members is explored in greater detail in the next section, as it creates the foundation for a key theme in this study.

Effective Interventions Require a Comprehensive Approach

To answer this study question, qualitative responses from Core Team members were analyzed through the lens of the mentoring model, in attempts to identify emerging themes related to educator needs, student needs, and professional development. The most prevalent theme that emerged when analyzing the qualitative data gathered from the Core Team members and collaborative inquiry partners was the need for more comprehensive professional development.

Several categories of feedback were given by Core Team members regarding the professional development for this study. The feedback centered around needing more content information on social and emotional learning concepts, requesting more extensive support on the concept of mentoring, and information and strategies surrounding at-risk students. The most frequent content request was for more training on the five CASEL competencies prior to facilitation of the lesson. It was noted by one Core Team member in the hallway one day, “Each competency could be a whole training on its own!” Other requests surrounded deeper dives into the structure of the lessons. Core Team member 6 asked for more support on the optimistic closures as she felt unprepared to implement these portions of the lessons. Core Team member 5 supported this by making the comment that while the lessons were easy to follow, he felt that the lesson could have made a greater impact if there were opportunities to practice implementation with each other and get feedback.

There was also consensus with Core Team members that the portion of professional development that centered on mentoring needed the most revamping. As stated by several Core Team members previously, the relationships are the more important component and little information was given on how to foster and develop these relationships. Furthermore, some of

the needs of students in this study as well as any student that is characterized as vulnerable or at-risk can potentially have far greater needs than the “average” person may be equipped to mitigate. For these students, support from a healthcare professional may be warranted. The responses from Core Team members indicated that the training and preparation an adult would need to adequately support the neediest of students is not accomplished by one person in one setting. The need extends far beyond that and as the needs of the students change, the support for the adults should also change.

Finally, feedback indicated adjustments should be made to the agenda to allow for more time to explore these topics. Several Core Team members used words and phrases like “on-going,” “more time needed,” and “not enough content.” Professional development should be responsive, on-going, and timely. Data indicated that the professional development as designed for this study seemed to fall short of these requirements

Summary

The results from the mixed methods, action research study supported that positive outcomes resulted from the implementation of the mentoring social and emotional learning framework. More specifically, it was found to increase levels of engagement and connectedness. During analysis, several ideas emerged from this study that have implications on future practices for vulnerable students at West Elementary who display at-risk characteristics. The outcomes from the study indicated that relationships are more important to social and emotional learning success than the actual social and emotional learning content. In addition, the type of student-teacher connections matter, and that there is an increased likelihood of success when more authentic connections are in place. Moreover, the findings from the study supported existent literature that professional development is essential for staff to meet the needs of at-risk,

vulnerable students (Borko et al., 2010). Quality professional development that is comprehensive and rigorous is necessary in order to create and implement practices that support the population of vulnerable students of at West Elementary.

The next chapter will detail the interpretations of these findings relative to the literature. The implications of these findings on equity and social justice, as well as on professional practice will be explored. Finally, recommendations for future study and conclusions are shared, followed by a detailed reflection on my leadership growth and development as a result of the process of conducting this study.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The brick-and-mortar school building is a place that provides material, social, and emotional support, and when the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the closing of most school buildings across the country, many students were unable to access these supports. While the long-term effects of this event may take years to determine, the short-term impacts were evident almost immediately. Data indicated that at West Elementary, most students were in need of academic and social and emotional support, but especially those students that displayed characteristics that were categorized as *at-risk* academically or *vulnerable*. The term *at-risk* indicates cause for concern, while the term *vulnerable* categorizes lack of support.

Students that fit into these categories often arrive in a classroom with a myriad of challenges greater than those of their peers, and these deficits can have impact on educational and behavioral outcomes. This population of students may not live in healthy, stable, or fully supportive environments and may have limited access to fully developed resources. The purpose of social and emotional learning is to build positive relationships, help students make responsible decisions, as well as develop healthy identities (CASEL, 2020a). Therefore, social and emotional learning can impact life outcome and whole-child development. For this population of students, described typically with the deficit-based terms such as *at-risk* and *vulnerable*, social and emotional learning can transform the paradigm upon which these students are viewed. Using the term *developing* postulates a more positive connotation and be a lever of change when advancing equity for this population of students. The term *developing* will replace the terms *at-risk* or *vulnerable*.

The purpose of this study was to support identified *developing* youth isolated in remote learning environments as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. One approach to mitigate the impacts of the isolating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic was to implement an online, social and emotional framework that incorporated online mentoring. This mixed methods, action research study, measured the impact of an online social and emotional online mentoring program on levels of student engagement and connectedness at West Elementary School.

Summary of the Findings

The implementation of the framework for students indicated overall positive outcomes. While the framework did not have a significant impact on levels of student engagement, it yielded a more substantial impact on student connectedness within the elementary environment. *Connectedness* is the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported in the school social environment (Osher et al., 2009), while *engagement* describes how involved or interested students appear to be in school or with a specific topic (Axelson & Flick, 2010). The study also explored how professional development can support staff in meeting specific needs of *developing* students. The findings indicated that the professional development provided in this study merely scratched the surface, and more comprehensive professional development was needed to extensively support the type of students focused on in this study. Several findings emerged from this study that have implications on future practices in working with students that can be categorized as *developing* within the academic environment and for the staff that are committed to supporting them.

Interpretation of the Findings

The data from this study yielded several themes. The findings align in many ways with the literature surrounding social and emotional learning, vulnerable youth, trauma, and

mentoring. The first study question explored how levels of student engagement could be impacted by the implementation of the social and emotional, online-mentoring framework. The intent of the framework in this study was to increase levels of engagement for students that were isolated in their homes as remote learners as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The anticipated outcome was that participation within the school environment would increase as a result of the CASEL lessons on the five SEL competencies. A mentoring model was integrated into the framework to create meaningful connections with adults to impact overall student well-being.

Study Question 1

The primary theme that emerged as a result of data analysis of study question one is that relationships are more important than content. The findings from this study indicated a weak relationship between the framework and increases in engagement. More specifically, the study indicated increases or decreases in engagement were not tied to one specific strategy or program but instead by the personalized interactions with peers and trusted adults.

Maslow's work (1943) indicated that love and belonging were precursors to growth. Students with deficiency needs at the love and esteem levels will receive fulfillment in a classroom with a supportive environment (Huitt, 2007). The Science of Learning and Development Model indicates that learning is connected to all contexts and is influenced by the experiences and interactions within a child's life (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Hattie (2017) supports that relationships have a .52 effect on achievement. Therefore, building positive student-teacher relationships is a potentially effective approach to making a positive impact on student achievement. Important to note is that high levels of student engagement foster positive outcomes in school including enhanced performance on standardized tests and increased graduation rates (Martin & Torres, 2016).

Study Question 2

The second study question explored how student connectedness could be impacted by the implementation of the social and emotional, online-mentoring framework. The intent of the framework was to increase levels of personal acceptance (i.e. connectedness) for students that were participating in online learning due to isolation within the home as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The anticipated outcome was an increase in feelings and perceptions of connections as a result of the content of the CASEL competencies, the structure of the family meetings and the time invested in each student as a result of the mentoring framework.

The findings from this study indicated an increase in levels of student connectedness as a result of the implementation. Quantitative data indicated that students' perceptions about liking school, including feeling as though they had friends and that people cared about them also increased as a result of participation in the study. Qualitative data support the concept that the type of connections matter. The family meetings designed for this study differed from the online content delivery that these students received from their classroom teachers daily. There was intentionality in the size of the smaller groups, the structure of each lesson, and the prioritization on interaction, conversation, and connection. These parameters allowed more teacher to student interaction and increased time for conversation surrounding topics of interest to the student participants. Both the adults and the student participants in this study agreed that the interactions within the family meetings held significance and the opportunities to connect with others was received well and became enjoyable, and they were markedly different experiences than the typical in school interactions.

Study Question 3

The research surrounding mentoring indicates that mentoring can foster positive developmental outcomes (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). The results from this study align with this assumption. In this study, the Core Team Members that were assigned to lead each family assumed the role of adult mentor of the group. As the adult mentors in the group, they were responsible for leading each family meeting as well as building relationships with students as well as between students in the group. Their role was to build trust within the group as well as support social and emotional development.

In addition to concluding a slight increase in levels of engagement as well as marked increase with levels of connection, the open-ended responses from students and staff further postulate the conclusion that the quality of time spent with children matters. From the beginning of the study to the end, the Core Team members indicated a noticeable difference in not only the comfort level of the children, but how much more they were sharing. At the beginning of the study, the students gave brief answers and had to be probed to answer questions. After several weeks of meetings, more students were openly sharing and as a result, the meetings began increase in duration.

This is further supported by the research surrounding Maslow's hierarchy of needs. If a student presents with deficiencies surrounding physiological, safety, belonging, or esteem, then learning could be a challenge until these needs are met. Many students considered to be vulnerable learners often have increases in academic, social, emotional, and physical struggles with increases in potential for negative life impacts (McDaniel & Yarbrough, 2016; Oldenfield et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2015). Therefore, it is concluded that the time that the SEL Core Team

members are spending with the student participants are mitigating the deficiency needs as presented by Maslow.

The third study question explored how strategic professional development can support staff in the ability to meet the needs of *developing* students. The intent of the framework was to increase levels of engagement and connectedness for students that were isolated in their homes as remote learners as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the adult participants to implement the framework designed for the study, intentional professional development had to occur. The anticipated intent of the professional development was to adequately equip the adult participants with the necessary content to accurately implement the framework but also be able to support the social and emotional needs of the students.

The findings from this study indicated that the professional development as designed was inadequate with request for more comprehensive professional development- in both content and process. Outside of the electronic platform in which the meetings were held, the other content areas (CASEL, mentoring, social and emotional learning) were mentioned by the Core Team members as topics that needed deeper exploration and support. While the members of the Core Team expressed varied levels of comfort with these individual topics, there was consistent expression of need for deeper exploration of these topics. In addition, one participant requested a segment to be added on data disaggregation and the team agreed that growing that skill would not only be beneficial to the study but would support their professional growth in other areas of their profession as well.

Research indicates that professional development should be integrated with other aspects of school change (Borko et al., 2010), and include follow-up and feedback (Yaron, 2017). In addition, for professional development to be effective there needs to be a long-term focus that

supports teachers as they work in collaborative groups within their own environment (Borko et al., 2010). The professional development that was designed for this study did not effectively do either of these things. When developed properly and to the extent that is correlative to the level of expertise that a Core Team member brings to the team, professional development can be incredibly supportive for staff when meeting the needs of specific populations of students. Therefore, it can be concluded that the professional development designed for this study did not strengthen the study, and possibly could have had a negative impact on the data collected, but at minimum should be an identified limitation.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations that existed within this study. The first was the unpredictable environment in which the study was implemented. The study was designed to be implemented during a pandemic. A pandemic within any environment creates uncertainty, and the COVID-19 pandemic created many unpredictable learning environments. This study was also designed to focus on students that were considered to have at-risk characteristics and were identified as *developing*. This identifier is generally synonymous with home environments that are less stable than those of peers and these students may often have unpredictable home environments. The instability could be a result of insecurities within the home, lack of financial resources, or neglect and abuse (Larose & Tarabulsky, 2014). Both factors combined created several limitations within the study, including impact on student participation, consistency within implementation, as well as commitment to the end. One student did not participate to the end of the study and was not present for the culminating focus group.

A second limitation within the study that could have impacted the data collected was the variances of implementation by the Core Team members. The study was designed for the Core

Team to conduct each family meeting independently and report back data to the researcher.

While all Core Team members received the same professional development, interpretation of this training and the implementation of the framework could vary. Careful consideration should be given to the pairing of adult partners when creating families to level expertise. To every extent possible, race and gender of Core Team members assigned to families should be varied as well as years of teaching experience and field. In addition, there were variations with comfort level regarding social and emotional learning and the format of an organized lesson plan. As a result, adding in time to review the upcoming content at the focus group meetings to mitigate variances could equalize implementations in all family groups.

Another limitation of the study was time span of implementation. The study was designed to be implemented from start to finish within one marking period (on average nine weeks), allowing for only one topic per week. Several topics, Self-Management and Relationship Skills, were topics that the Core Team felt needed more time for exploration. The correlating activities for each of these topics, The Worry Scale and Friendship Traits, were topics that the student participants needed more support to show mastery. To mitigate this, the study could be redesigned to engage students in each topic for a greater period. As a result of the study, a minimum of two weeks per topic would be sufficient to allow time for increased interaction, connection, and application of the CASEL skills.

A final limitation that could have had impact on the outcome of the research was that the action research took place where the researcher was also the administrator. This factor could have had an impact on the study in several ways. The first way in which this could have created a limitation for the study surrounded the levels of authentic interest from the staff and could have influenced participation levels. While social and emotional learning is part of the West

Elementary School Improvement Plan and is therefore a focus at West Elementary, only six staff members participated in the study. In addition to the deficits that existed within the professional development framework, there were other limitations that developed as the study was implemented.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

There were several theoretical and conceptual frameworks that impacted this study. The first theoretical foundation was Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943). This theory suggested that before learning can occur, the environment in which the student exists must be favorable, to include positive experiences early in life that establish a foundation to undertake more rigorous tasks later in life (Neto, 2015). For the population of developing students that participated in the study, these students may have varying types of deficiencies (material, emotional, and social) and the intent was to identify and mitigate these deficiencies so that learning can occur. Maslow's model explained *why* students may be identified as developing.

The second theoretical foundation of this study is the Science of Learning and Development Model which supports the concept that learning is connected to all contexts, is influenced by the experiences and interactions within a child's life, and therefore learning is a personal and individualized process (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). This model was important in this study as it established the foundation that a learning environment should be built upon relationships and attachments, be supportive, and develop interpersonal skills. The SoLD model explained *what* developing youth need to mitigate deficiencies.

The CASEL framework identifies several core behaviors that are essential to successful emotional management, goal setting, establishing positive relationships and responsible decision making. The CASEL social and emotional framework would provide justification for the

assumption that social and emotional development can be nurtured and should be developed in a systematic way (CASEL, 2020c) as well as serving as a critical practice for promoting equity and an anti-biased education for at-risk, vulnerable youth (Scharf, 2018). The CASEL framework provided clarification on *how* to support developing youth with lessons on five core competencies.

The Youth Mentoring Model supports the idea that mentoring can foster positive developmental outcomes such as emotional well-being, improved academic performance, and healthy social connections (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). This conceptual framework is important to the study as it established a modality to infuse social and emotional learning skills and provide other supports as needed. This model established *when* support can be implemented for developing youth.

These four frameworks combined to create an interesting paradigm that set a foundation for this study. The foundation of this study is the implementation of a framework. This framework was designed around CASEL competencies and included children's literature. The structure of each lesson was established on research-based principles and focused on action, which signifies engagement. Therefore, the assumption was that levels of engagement should increase as a result of implementation, but that was not the outcome. Rather, levels of connectedness increased as a result of implementation. Connectedness is linked to feelings, emotions, and perceptions. The two key themes of this study (*relationships matter more than content* and the *type of connections matter*) summarize these findings. Therefore, the greatest implication of these findings on practice is to focus on fostering connections which are based in Maslow's work as well as the Youth Mentoring model, rather than the content of CASEL.

For school leaders, the implications of this study suggest that there should a heavy prioritization on social and emotional learning. With the closing of the brick-and-mortar buildings, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, most educators believed that learning could continue without interruption. As the pandemic lengthened, and absences at West Elementary increased, several challenges emerged. Preparation ensued to adjust the delivery of the core content the upcoming year to allow for the unfinished learning that occurred when the buildings were closed.

What the staff was not prepared for when students returned to the building and remote learning ended for most students was the overwhelming deficits in soft skills. Many students, even those that attended school once the buildings re-opened, lacked the ability to successfully execute interpersonal skills to engage respectfully and successfully with others. The students that spent the entire year in remote learning who already exhibited at-risk factors and who were identified as vulnerable, presented greater difficulty in engaging with others successfully upon return. These deficits were impacting the ability to facilitate learning within the building at West Elementary and for many others. This discovery implicated that intentional time was needed to be spent teaching these skills within an authentic educational environment for remote learners and well as students in a face-to-face learning environment.

Additionally, this study indicated that daily prioritization for social and emotional skills should occur within the academic and social environments. While this study concentrated on six weeks of implementation that covered all five domains of CASEL competencies, qualitative data indicated that priority needed to be given to consistently and intentionally building a culture that creates connections and focuses on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making, which should span greater than six weeks.

The need for intentional and continued focus on supporting the social and emotional needs of elementary school students was further punctuated by findings that emerged surrounding the importance of building connections after many students returned to face to face learning. As school districts reopened, increased reports of violence emerged across the United States and experts began looking for a root cause. Lack of connection and isolation are risk factors associated with the profiles of youth that commit acts of violence (Smith & Sandhu, 2004). After being isolated in homes for an extended period, students returned to the classroom with fractious tendencies in social settings. The impact is an increase in violence levels as a result of isolation and trauma from the pandemic, supported by school shooting rates and reported mental health crises (Sawchuck, 2021). As a result, several actions to increase levels of engagement and connection should maintain a top priority for not only isolates students but also for those students that are returning to face-to-face learning. This includes a critical analysis of the current discipline continuum to decrease punitive actions while building improved relationships between school and home.

Implications of the Findings for Equity

Developing youth often must mitigate more obstacles than their peers. These can include deficiencies in at least one, but often multiple domains. Developing youth may face material deficiencies (money, food, shelter, health care), emotional deficiencies (care, love, support), or even social deficiencies (friends, mentors, and coping skills). The material, emotional, and social resources within the school building often support these students when the home environment may be challenged to do so. When school buildings closed as a result of the pandemic, access to equitable learning opportunities was impacted. Research indicates that children of color, as well as children who come from lower socio-economic households, have low academic achievement

levels and higher discipline rates, and these disparities cause inequity as they are a result of bias (Morsy & Rothstein, 2015; Rocque & Snellings, 2018). In addition, remote environments present issues of inequity for developing youth, as these students have greater deficiency needs than that of their peers (McDaniel & Yarbrough, 2016). Research indicates that in addition to influence on academics, social and emotional learning promotes healthier life choices and improved health outcomes (Domitrovich et al., 2017a).

A social and emotional learning framework with mentoring could eliminate the chasm that exists between those of affluence and those that are economically disadvantaged as well as those students with geographically isolating residences found mainly in rural areas. The intentionality within the design of the framework served as a leveling agent regarding the types of soft skills vulnerable students may need but may lack. These soft skills can include emotional regulation, empathy, responsible personal behavior, and effective interpersonal skills. This was purposeful to promote wellness for a population of students that were nominated by teachers as students that may be in unstable homes; homes without the presence of an adult or that may lack emotional support. When layered within a mentoring framework, students within the study were exposed to not only social and emotional skills but several critical practices to foster healing as well as create supportive environments. The crosswalk between these skills as they relate to the implementation of the pacing of the study can be found in Table 6.

Recommendations for Practice

As a result of this study, there are several recommendations for practice. The most impactful, and perhaps the most difficult recommendation, is to shift paradigms regarding elementary students in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. While this study set out to focus on students that were entering into remote learning with characteristics that already place them at

risk and are considered *developing*, the practices of engaging with students in dialogue and creating intentional positive interactions that build meaningful relationships benefits all students.

As a result of the pandemic, educators could assume that all children were impacted in some way and that all students may have deficiencies in some aspect of their lives. The assumption surrounding Maslow's motivation model (1963) is that if a deficiency is present, an individual's behaviors will focus on removing the deficiency. Therefore, if all students could be affected by the pandemic in some way, then all students could be categorized as *developing* in some way and would benefit from social and emotional learning interventions to mitigate any deficiency.

If the assumption is held that all students could benefit from social and emotional learning supports and practices, then a second recommendation is to implement social and emotional practices for all students that build a strong sense of community within the classroom, whether online or virtual. In doing so, an established and intentional focus on social and emotional learning to invoke action that aligns with research becomes the priority. While there are many ways in which to do this, one recommendation for practice is to dedicate this time at the start of the day. Engaging students at the start of the day creates a reliable routine and establishes a consistent time to incorporate social and emotional soft skills. This is an important component of building a safe and secure environment which can then increase engagement in learning. (Hemmeter et al., 2006). The responses from the adults that engaged in this study indicated that dedicated time for family meetings supported students in the online environment. One recommendation to accomplish this is to participate in a social and emotional learning practice like Morning Meeting. Morning Meeting is a structured meeting in which students engage in four intentional practices - greeting, sharing, group activity, and morning message -

that allow students to practice interpersonal skills as well as give an arena for feedback. This structure is part of a responsive classroom and can align with PBIS practices (Kriete & Davis, 2017).

Therefore, if social and emotional learning is a priority and that all students would benefit, then a final recommendation for future practice is incorporation of ongoing professional development for effective social and emotional learning practices. While the framework created for this study included the CASEL components and mentoring practices, data indicated that the professional development designed for implementation lacked depth and did not successfully create efficacy to execute the framework confidently. Therefore, a final recommendation would be to create a continuum of professional development that encompasses the CASEL competencies, mentoring, and Morning Meeting that is presented throughout the year to support the social and emotional needs of all students. To successfully support students presenting with characteristics of being at-risk or vulnerable, additional professional development within the mentoring modules would be beneficial. In addition, the data from this study indicated that the professional development modules could be more effective if opportunities for feedback were included.

Effective professional development is focused on content (Desimone, 2011), situated in practice and has a long-term focus that supports teachers (Borko et al., 2010). Effective professional development is also linked to raising student achievement levels (Lai & McNaughton, 2016). The content of this study included information on the characteristics of developing youth, but also included social and emotional learning foundations and CASEL competencies as well as content on mentoring and coaching. The professional development in this study was front-loaded and isolated to only two sessions which did not adequately support

the Core Team Members. Achievement levels may increase with more in-depth and ongoing professional development in the areas of development of the whole child, social and emotional learning competencies, and assuming the role of mentor to create positive outcomes for students.

Recommendations for Future Study

There are several arenas of research that could succeed this study. The first would be to increase the levels of engagement and connectedness for educators. The same research that indicates that levels of engagement and connectedness create positive student outcomes would support that increasing these levels could positively impact teachers and administrators.

Therefore, future studies could focus on the social and emotional needs of the adults within the educational setting. Social and emotional learning structures can foster a sense of belonging by creating an environment of emotional safety and community (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018). How does the implementation of activities to foster a sense of belonging impact the hiring and retention of high-quality educators? How would a focus on social and emotional learning by fostering mentoring relationships with administrators impact retention rates?

A second recommendation for future study would be a deeper dive into practices that support students in a restorative environment. An environment in which social and emotional practices combine with personal responsibility and academic competencies is a proactive approach that focuses on community. A combination of restorative practices with social and emotional learning builds empathy between students and creates a healthy school culture (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). How does restorative practices, when combined with social and emotional learning, impact students in the classroom? Do these practices decrease discipline rates or rates of violence? Do they increase levels of connectedness for students in an elementary setting?

Another recommendation for future study focuses on executive functioning and how these practices support social and emotional learning. These are skills that are required to function successfully in a complex and dynamic environment. According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2017), these are not skills that a child is born with, but all can develop. Developing these skills in adolescence can change behavioral trajectories that can have impact into adulthood. Executive functioning can be built into a social and emotional framework or can be integrated into the already established PBIS practices. How does intentional teaching of foundational executive functioning strategies impact misbehaviors in the classroom? Does explicit focus on executive functioning support the needs of the whole child as described in the SoLD model (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020)?

A final area of future study that could be explored from this research is the concept of house system within an elementary setting. The term “house” refers to a group of people, rather than a structure. A house system in an educational environment is vertical grouping of students across multiple levels or grades. The purpose of these vertical groupings is to build smaller school communities. The goal of the smaller community, or “house,” is to create an atmosphere where all students belong and feel supported. Loyalty is built within the house and each house has unique identifiers like a house color, motto, founding principle, etc. All houses within a school focus on a common mission and vision.

Many aspects of school culture can be positively impacted by a house system with successful implementation hinges that upon effective program design (Green, 2006). When carried out effectively, a house system can improve the educational environment in many ways. House systems can strengthen interpersonal relationships and community. How would the

implementation of a house system impact levels of connection? Does the implementation of house system within an elementary environment decrease discipline rates?

Conclusions

This study began with the intention to connect with kids in a meaningful way. As a leader in an elementary setting, it is the belief that all kids need these connections. However, data suggested that students that were considered to be vulnerable, or present with at-risk factors, could have an intensified need for support once isolated in a remote setting due to the closing of the brick-and-mortar school buildings in response to COVID-19. This could include students from poverty, special needs students, students without supportive adults, students without access to technology, students living in homes that do not speak English, and/or students from abusive or neglectful homes. All these populations would face greater challenges and obstacles than others learning from home.

Without the core belief that all students can learn and that all students should have the same opportunities to equal access to education, it was evident that something needed to be done to support these populations of students while learning in remote environments. While the challenges could not be eliminated, this study aimed to identify effective social and emotional practices to support students through the challenges, while proactively building soft skills to support equity. This study indicated that relationships are important to supporting all students, but for students who have challenges greater than peers, relationships are essential to student success.

Maslow's research suggested that students have certain needs that must be met before learning can occur (Maslow, 1963). These needs include safety, love, and belonging. This study was designed with the purpose of increasing levels of engagement and connectedness with

students that were isolated in remote learning environments due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but who also were identified as having at risk behaviors. The framework that was created as part of the study incorporated several social and emotional research-based approaches in order to achieve the desired goal. While the data from this study proved that the framework increased levels of connectedness, it was not the content of the lessons that made the impact as much as it was the investment of time in the students.

Both qualitative and quantitative data support the findings that the type of relationships built are impactful, and responses from study participants indicated that relationships matter more than content. Significant impact can be seen with levels of motivation and the level in which feel included when there is strong relationships at school (Crouch et al., 2014; The Education Trust, 2021). Intentional relationship building with students is a top priority when supporting social and emotional needs of students.

Finally, professional development should be well planned, collaborative, and comprehensive (Hunsicker, 2010) in order to sustain the level of support teachers would need to adequately meet the needs of students that are considered vulnerable. Data from the study indicated that the professional development provided for this study lacked the level of rigor and complexity that participants felt was necessary to understand social and emotional learning concepts in depth as well as feel successful in supporting students in a mentoring environment.

Scholarly Practitioner Reflections on Leadership

While the COVID 19 pandemic caused world-wide death and uncalculated levels of destruction, within the educational arena, it brought social and emotional practices to the forefront as priority. Now more so than ever, educators are seeing the importance of establishing relationships, building connections, and intentionally teaching students how to exist with one and

other. One way to do that is to be intentional about prioritizing social and emotional learning within the academic day. Social and emotional learning encompasses skills that support learning and development across several domains. While often used as an umbrella term that encompasses many topics, social and emotional learning should be the foundation in which all other things are built.

From a leadership perspective, this study exposed the inequities that exist within the educational arena for so many populations of students. The struggles of the poor and economically disadvantaged were brought to the forefront with a constant reminder that simple needs can go unmet when survival is at stake. And while internet connections and electronic devices were once considered *wants* and not *needs*, the closing of the school buildings quickly showed educators the debilitating academic conditions that are created for students in remote learning environments without these items. And when these needs are mainly isolated to one population of students based on parental income, a factor that is completely out of control for the student, the reality is that many children work against disadvantages within the educational environment that can impact them for years to come.

For an educational leader, the primary responsibility is to provide a safe learning environment that is focused on academic achievement. For students that may live in unstable homes, the school building may be only source of consistency and support. The school building may be the only place that provides a warm meal, an encouraging word, or emotional support. This study focused on populations of students who lived in environments where academic support, loving role models, or nourishment were often lacking. With every day the school buildings remained closed, the children suffered. While the pandemic was not something that was within our control, the need to protect our children should remain a priority.

The heart-breaking reality is the protection, guidance and investment of the youth should not be the sole responsibility of the school, but often educators find themselves carrying multiple roles in a child's life. As remote learning environments are growing in popularity as a result of not only the pandemic, but the ever-changing world, the charge for educational leaders must be to support not only the academic needs of students but find ways to grow our youth in social and emotional aspects as well. We have a responsibility to serve as a societal leveling agent for our students in the academic, behavioral, and social and emotional arenas, or we may be failing as educational leaders in more ways than one.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Amendment Approval

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Jamie Tyler](#)
CC: [Travis Lewis](#)
Date: 6/18/2021
Re: [Ame1_UMCIRB 21-000372](#)
[UMCIRB 21-000372](#)
CONNECTING DURING COVID: MEETING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF AT-RISK ELEMENTARY STUDENTS DURING A PANDEMIC

Your Amendment has been reviewed and approved using expedited review on 6/18/2021. It was the determination of the UMCIRB Chairperson (or designee) that this revision does not impact the overall risk/benefit ratio of the study and is appropriate for the population and procedures proposed.

Please note that any further changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a Final Report application to the UMCIRB prior to the Expected End Date provided in the IRB application. If the study is not completed by this date, an Amendment will need to be submitted to extend the Expected End Date. The investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Description
Expected end date extended to 6/30/2022

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM (FACULTY)

Informed Consent Form for WES Faculty

Jamie Tyler

East Carolina University

Project: The implementation of a social and emotional learning framework for at-risk students

Part I: Information

Introduction

I am a doctoral student in the College of the Education at East Carolina University pursuing my EdD in Educational Leadership. My dissertation is a focus of practice in which I identify a need in the building and create a plan to address the need.

Purpose of the research

This focus of practice project is the implementation of a social and emotional learning framework in an online setting to increase levels of school engagement and connection for vulnerable, at-risk youth isolated in remote learning environments due to the pandemic.

Type of Research Intervention

This intervention involves weekly small group meetings with vertical student groups. Each meeting will implement a lesson linked to one of the five CASEL social and emotional learning competencies.

Participant Selection

Participation in the study is open to any staff member at West Elementary.

Voluntary Participation

Participation is completely voluntary. Choosing to participate or declining participation will have no impact on your job.

Procedures

Participation in the study designates you a member of the SEL Core Team. As an SEL Core Team member, you will be asked to do the following:

- Collaborate with the researcher to identify the student selection criteria
- Select students for participation in the study
- Collaborate with at least one other member of the SEL Core Team to facilitate small group meetings with students
- Meet with students in small groups weekly for six weeks
- Take anecdotal notes during and after the small group meetings
- Participate in three focus groups conducted by the researcher
- Maintain confidentiality of student discussions within the small groups

Duration

Participation in the study will span about 8 weeks. This will include up to two weeks for training and student selection and six weeks of weekly small group meetings.

Risks

There are no risks associated with participation in this study.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to you for participation in the study, however, your participation is likely to help identify and develop activities that could benefit students that struggle academically, behaviorally, or socially.

Reimbursements

There are no financial reimbursements in return for participation in this study.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. I will not share any information about you.

The following applies to focus groups:

You will be asked to participate in three focus groups. You will be asked not to talk to others outside the group about what was discussed at the focus groups. You will be asked to keep focus group discussions confidential. However, I will not be able to prevent members of the focus groups from sharing information.

Sharing the Results

The results of the study will be shared with all staff at West Elementary School once all data has been collected and analyzed. The results from this study will also be shared with East Carolina University. The results of the study could possibly be shared through publications and conferences.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You have the right to stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. You will have the opportunity to review the data gathered from the focus group in which you participate.

Who to Contact

This proposal has been reviewed by the East Carolina University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This is a committee whose task is to make sure research participants are protected from harm. If you have questions about this study, or about the East Carolina University IRB, please contact Dr. Travis Lewis at lewistr16@ecu.edu.

Part II: Certificate of Consent

I have read the information above, and I have had opportunities to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Printed Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____/_____/_____

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM (PARENT)

Informed Consent Form for WS Parents of Student Participants

Jamie Tyler

East Carolina University

Project: The implementation of a social and emotional learning framework for students that could be considered at-risk academically or vulnerable due to other factors.

Many students are staying at home in remote learning environments because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This challenge may make things harder for you at school. The hope is that if your child participates in these small groups built in the study, they build connections and become more engaged in school. If your child participates in this study, they will spend some time outside of class in small groups with other students that are also isolated at home. In these small groups we will focus on Social and Emotional Learning skills. These groups will meet once a week for 6 weeks. Each meeting will last between 30- 45 minutes.

Part I: Information

Introduction

I am a doctoral student in the College of the Education at East Carolina University pursuing my EdD in Educational Leadership. My dissertation is a focus of practice in which I identify a need in the building and create a plan to address the need.

Purpose of the research

This focus of practice project is the implementation of a social and emotional learning framework in an online setting to increase levels of school engagement and connection for vulnerable, at-risk youth isolated in remote learning environments due to the pandemic.

Type of Research Intervention

This intervention involves weekly small group meetings with a small group of students. Each meeting will implement a lesson linked to one of the five CASEL social and emotional learning competencies. These are Self Awareness and Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision Making.

Participant Selection

Students in grades Kindergarten through Fifth grade from virtual classrooms that have been nominated by their teacher. Criteria for nomination requires students to have academic, behavioral, or social and emotional needs.

Voluntary Participation

Participation is completely voluntary. Choosing to participate or declining participation will have no impact on student grades or promotion.

Procedures

Participation from your child in the study asks them to do the following:

- Watch an introductory video
- Take a Self-assessment prior to starting weekly group meetings. The Self-assessment will be emailed to the parent and the student.
- Meet in a virtual small group every Wednesday from 9:00-9:45 for six weeks. The small group will take place on Google Meet and will be led by two WES staff members.
- Participate in one small group with Mrs. Tyler, the researcher.
- Take a Self-assessment after all group meetings are over. It is the same Self-assessment taken prior to the start of the study.

Participation from the parent of the child in the study asks you to do the following:

- Watch an introductory video
- Assist your student (if needed) in taking the Self-assessment prior to starting weekly group meetings.
- Assist your student (if needed) with attending the virtual small group every Wednesday from 9:00-9:45 for six weeks.
- Assist your student (if needed) to participate in one small group with Mrs. Tyler, the researcher.
- Assist your student (if needed) to take the Self-assessment after all group meetings are over.

Duration

Participation in the study will span about 8 weeks. This will include one week for preparation (including watching the video and taking the Self-assessment), six weeks of weekly meetings, and one week for small group meeting with Mrs. Tyler and the second Self-assessment.

Risks

There are no risks associated with participation in this study.

Benefits

Participation in this study could benefit your child and help them to improve academically, behaviorally, or socially.

Reimbursements

There are no financial reimbursements in return for participation in this study.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. I will not share any information about you or your child.

The following applies to focus groups:

Your child will be asked to participate in a focus group. They will be asked not to talk to others outside the group about what was discussed at the focus groups and will be asked to keep focus group discussions confidential. However, I will not be able to prevent members of the focus groups from sharing information.

If you would like to see the questions that will be asked in the focus group, I can send these to you.

Sharing the Results

The results of the study will be shared with all staff at West Elementary School once all data has been collected and analyzed. No personal information will be shared. No students will be identified in this study.

The results from this study will also be shared with East Carolina University. The results of the study could possibly be shared through publications and conferences.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You have the right to stop your child from participating in the study at any time without penalty.

Who to Contact

This proposal has been reviewed by the East Carolina University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This is a committee whose task is to make sure research participants are protected from harm. If you have questions about this study, or about the East Carolina University IRB, please contact Dr. Travis Lewis at lewistr16@ecu.edu.

In addition, you can always contact me with any additional questions about the study:

tylerj96@students.ecu.edu .

Part II: Certificate of Consent

I have read the information about above and I have had opportunities to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to allow my child to be a participant in this study.

Printed Name of Student Participant

Printed Name of Parent

Signature of Parent

Date _____/_____/_____

APPENDIX D: INFORMED ASSENT FORM (STUDENT)

Informed Assent Form for WES Student

Jamie Tyler

East Carolina University

Project: The implementation of a social and emotional learning framework for at-risk students

Part I: Information

Introduction

My name is Mrs. Jamie Tyler, and I am a student at East Carolina University. I have to complete a project at West Elementary. I am asking you to be a part of my project.

Purpose of the research

I hope my project will help students who are learning from home. I hope my project will bring students together who are learning in very separate spaces all around our community.

Participant Selection

I am asking you to be a part of this project because you are a student at West Elementary and you attend school in a virtual classroom. I am asking you to participate because your teacher said you might want to participate. You are learning from home, and this might be making learning even harder than it can be.

Voluntary Participation

You have the choice to say YES or NO. Of course, I hope you say yes, but I will not be upset with you if you decide you do not want to participate. You can change your mind at any time.

Procedures

If you say YES, this is what I am going to ask you to do:

- Watch a video from me telling all about this project
- Join online meetings with two teachers and a few other kids from West Elementary. These kids could be in any of the grades at school! 😊
 - These meetings will happen on Wednesday 9:00-9:45. This will be your morning meeting for the day.
 - There will be 6 online meetings.
- Have one extra meeting with Mrs. Tyler and other kids in your grade level.
- Answer five questions before you start meeting.
- Answer five questions after you meet with Mrs. Tyler.

Confidentiality

I am asking that you keep what we talk about confidential. That means you can talk to your parents or trusted adult about the meetings, but not with other friends or classmates. We want to make sure that the others in the meetings know that we can be trusted.

PART 2: Certificate of Assent

I have read this information (or had the information read to me). I have had my questions answered and know that I can ask questions later if I have them.

Choose One:

- I agree to be part of the project.**
- I do not wish to be a part of the project.**

Print name of child _____

Signature of child: _____

Date: _____ / _____ / _____

APPENDIX E: STAFF PILOT STUDY FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Introduction:

I am a doctoral student in the College of the Education at East Carolina University pursuing my EdD in Educational Leadership. I appreciate your willingness to participate today.

Hand out the consent form.

Ask participants to review, ask any questions, and then sign the consent/demographic form.

Give a very brief overview of the project and goals for the focus group:

My dissertation is a focus of practice in which I identify a need in the building and create a plan to address the need.

This focus of practice project is the implementation of a social and emotional learning framework in an online setting to increase levels of school engagement and connection for vulnerable, at-risk youth isolated in remote learning environments due to the pandemic.

This project involves collecting data from surveys, assessments, and focus groups.

Your participation today is the pilot study for future focus groups.

Review basic guidelines for the focus group:

Before we get started, let's review some ground rules for today.

Being here is voluntary.

Keep personal stories "in the room"; do not share the identity of the attendees or what anybody else said outside of the meeting.

Everyone's ideas will be respected.

One person talks at a time.

It's okay to take a break if needed or to help yourself to food or drink (if provided).

Everyone has the right to talk

There are no right or wrong answers.

Does anybody have any questions?

I will be recording this meeting today for data analysis later. This meeting will be kept confidential. I will ask you and others in the group not to talk to people outside the group about what was said in the group. I cannot stop or prevent participants who were in the group from sharing things that should be confidential.

Let people know when you are going to ask the last question.

Today I will ask you four questions. You can answer any question at any time.

What is one word that comes to mind when you think about Social and emotional Learning?

Describe one practice that you find to be impactful supporting the social and emotional needs of your students.

What are some struggles that students face in a virtual learning environment?

How can we connect with students during remote learning?

Does anyone have anything else they want to add?

Thank you for participating.

APPENDIX F: DEMOGRAPHIC FORM-STAFF PILOT FOCUS GROUP

Demographic Form for Pilot Study Participants

Participant Name: _____

Grade level or Department: _____

Years in Education: _____

College/University attended

Bachelors: _____

Masters: _____

Doctoral: _____

Other Certifications: _____

First Job: _____

I agree to participate in the pilot study.

Signature of Participant: _____

APPENDIX G: STAFF SURVEY-AT-RISK CHARACTERISTICS

Vulnerable youth are characterized by demographic and environmental factors and are susceptible for poorer outcomes in life when compared to peers (Shah et al., 2015).

The term vulnerable identifies any types of students who lack material elements (food, clothing, and shelter), emotional elements (care, love, and support) or social elements (friends and positive role models). Students who are vulnerable are often described as at-risk at school. These students can be at-risk for academics, behaviors, or social and emotional needs.

Please list up to five characteristics that describe vulnerable, at-risk youth. These can be academic or social and emotional characteristics. What types of descriptors describe students that present with challenges in the academic environment?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

These characteristics will be used to create a comprehensive list of identifiers used to label a student “vulnerable and at-risk” at West Elementary.

APPENDIX H: STUDENT NOMINATION FORM

Please take a moment to nominate a student from your class that you feel might benefit from small group meetings with WES staff centered around the five CASEL (2020) competencies.

Name of Student	
Home room Teacher	
Student Grade	
Name of Person nominating	
Identifiers	Please circle any of the following characteristics that apply to this student:
Additional Information	Is there anything else that you would like to share about this student?

APPENDIX I: SEL PROFILE QUESTIONS

Student Name
Grade
Gender:
Race:
Student lives with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Mother and father <input type="radio"/> Mother only <input type="radio"/> Father only <input type="radio"/> Mother and step-parent <input type="radio"/> Father and step-parent <input type="radio"/> Other: _____
Are there custody issues? YES NO
Current grade in ELA: Math: Science: Social Studies:
How many days of school has the student missed this year? What was the date of the last absence?
What is this student's greatest strength?
What is one area to focus on for growth?
On a scale of 1-10, with 1 indicating NOT AT ALL and 10 indicating ALL THE TIME, How engaged is the student in school activities? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
On a scale of 1-10, with 1 indicating NOT AT ALL and 10 indicating VERY, How proficient is this student with the following behaviors: SELF AWARENESS: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
SOCIAL AWARENESS: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
SELF-MANAGEMENT: The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
RELATIONSHIP SKILLS: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

APPENDIX K: FAMILY MEETING LESSON #1

SEL Standard	CASEL Standard: Self-Awareness
Definition	The ability to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across context.
Welcoming/Inclusion Activity	Read : <u>I Like Myself!</u> by Karen Beaumont
Engagement	What are 5 things you like about yourself?
Instruction	All About Me posters
Optimistic Closure	Affirmations

APPENDIX L: FAMILY MEETING LESSON #2

SEL Standard	CASEL Standard: Self-Management
Definition	The ability to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.
Welcoming/Inclusion Activity	Read : <u>Worry says What?</u> by Allison Edwards
Engagement	The Worry Scale https://www.centervention.com/coping-worry-fear/
Instruction	Student Worry Scale https://media.centervention.com/pdf/Worry-Scale-Worksheet.pdf
Optimistic Closure	Square Breathing https://media.centervention.com/pdf/Fill-Worry-Cup.pdf

APPENDIX M: FAMILY MEETING LESSON #3

SEL Standard	CASEL Standard: Social Awareness
Definition	The ability to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts.
Welcoming/Inclusion Activity	Read : <u>Adrian Simcox Does NOT Have a Horse</u> by Marcy Campbell Brain pop jr: https://jr.brainpop.com/health/feelings/empathy/
Engagement	Explain that understanding how another person is feeling is called <u>empathy</u> , and when we express empathy toward other people, we are showing that we care about them. Empathy Lesson https://media.centerintervention.com/pdf/Empathy-Identifying-Feelings.pdf
Instruction	Post activity discussion https://media.centerintervention.com/pdf/Empathy-Identifying-Feelings.pdf
Optimistic Closure	I am Curious (CASEL, 2020)

APPENDIX N: FAMILY MEETING LESSON #4

SEL Standard	CASEL Standard: Relationship Skills
Definition	The ability to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
Welcoming/Inclusion Activity	Read: <u>First Come the Zebra</u> by Lynne Barasch
Engagement	Friendship Traits https://www.centervention.com/making-keeping-friends-friendship-traits/ https://media.centervention.com/pdf/Good-and-Bad-Friends.pdf
Instruction	Social Initiation https://media.centervention.com/pdf/Be-a-Friend.pdf
Optimistic Closure	I am Curious (CASEL, 2020) Mancala

APPENDIX O: FAMILY MEETING LESSON #5

SEL Standard	CASEL Standard: Responsible Decision Making
Objectives	The ability to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.
Welcoming/Inclusion Activity	Read <u>Salt in His Shoes</u> by Michael Jordan
Engagement	Action Plan Template: Plan Ahead https://www.centervention.com/plan-ahead/
Instruction	Create an Action Plan https://media.centervention.com/pdf/Action-Plan.pdf
Optimistic Closure	One Minute Accolade

APPENDIX P: FAMILY MEETING LESSON #6

SEL Standard	CASEL Standard: Culminating Lesson Heart and Art
Objectives	To fellowship and apply all strategies learned in the study.
Welcoming/Inclusion Activity	Read: We're All Wonders R.J. Palacio
Engagement	Create a Wonder Portrait
Optimistic Closure	One Minute Accolade and Art Share

APPENDIX Q: SEL CORE TEAM FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Introduction:

This focus group is a part of the data gathering process in this study. I appreciate your willingness to participate today.

Hand out the consent form.

Ask participants to review, ask any questions, and then sign the consent/demographic form.

Give a very brief overview of the project and goals for the focus group:

Today we are going to discuss the last two family meetings.

Review basic guidelines for the focus group:

Before we get started, let's review some ground rules for today.

- *Being here is voluntary.*
- *Keep personal stories "in the room"; do not share the identity of the attendees or what anybody else said outside of the meeting.*
- *Everyone's ideas will be respected.*
- *One person talks at a time.*
- *It's okay to take a break if needed or to help yourself to food or drink (if provided).*
- *Everyone has the right to talk*
- *There are no right or wrong answers.*
- *Does anybody have any questions?*

I will be recording this meeting today for data analysis later. This meeting will be kept confidential. I will ask you and others in the group not to talk to people outside the group about what was said in the group. I cannot stop or prevent participants who were in the group from sharing things that should be confidential.

Let people know when you are going to ask the last question.

Today I will ask you four questions. I will be recording the data so please answer each question individually.

1. *Student participation recap:*
 1. *Number of students that participated*
 2. *Change from last meeting*
2. *Reflections on implementation of the lesson(s)*
 1. *Glow*
 2. *Grow*
3. *Student Notes*
 1. *Survey review*
 2. *Student issues*
4. *Questions or Comments*

Does anyone have anything else they want to add?

Thank you for participating.

APPENDIX R: STUDENT SURVEY(K-2)

Name:

Grade:

1. Tell about one thing that made you happy this week.
2. Tell about one thing that worries you right now.
3. After this meeting do you feel better, worse, or the same? Can you say why?
4. Name one way the meeting was helpful.
5. Did you do all of your work from your teacher this week?
6. Did you attend school every day this week?

APPENDIX S: PHASE II STUDENT SURVEY(3-5)

Name:

Grade:

1. Tell about one positive thing this week.
2. Tell about one moment this week that was not positive.
3. After this meeting do you feel better, worse, or the same? Why do you feel this way?
4. On a scale of 1-10, how helpful are these meetings? Can you name one thing that helped you?
5. Did you complete all of your assignments this week?
6. Did you attend school every day this week?

APPENDIX T: STUDENT FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

<p>Introduction: <i>Today we are meeting to talk about the six family meetings that you have gone to.</i></p>			
<p>Expectations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Everyone can talk, but only one person talks at a time.</i> • <i>Mute yourself when others are talking.</i> • <i>There are no right or wrong answers.</i> • <i>Does anyone have any questions?</i> <p><i>I am going to record this meeting so I can watch it later.</i></p> <p><i>Today I am going to ask you four questions and when I call on you, please share your answer.</i></p>			
	Kindergarten & 1st	2nd & 3rd	4th & 5th
Q1	Can you share one feeling word about being in a group and meeting in your family?	Choose one word that describes your feelings about participating in these meetings.	Choose one word to summarize your feelings about this experience.
Q2	What was one thing that you learned from your family?	Which meeting did you learn the most? What did you learn?	Which meeting did you learn the most? What did you learn?
Q3	Did the meetings make you feel different about school?	Did any part of this experience change the way you feel about school?	Did any part of this experience change the way you feel about school?
Q4	What else do you want to add?	What else do you want to add?	What else do you want to add?
<p><i>Does anyone have anything else they want to add?</i> <i>Thank you for participating.</i></p>			

